

# The Messenger

Spring 2013

University of Richmond  
Literary Arts Magazine

## Letter From the Editors

As you flip through these pages, watching a slideshow of black and white blurs from around the rim of a steaming cup of a venti non-fat, no foam, no water, 6-pump, extra hot, chai tea latte, we hope you will see the hundreds of hours we spent poring over our computers making this Spring 2013 issue of *The Messenger*. We hope you will feel the warmth of our hearts and our dedication in every letter of Helvetica font. This book you hold is the largest and most diverse issue to date, the result of a creative, driven, and enthusiastic staff that we couldn't be more proud of. Our mission is to offer a lasting forum for artists and writers on campus, and to carry this presence from year to year through a sleek, recognizable design that will make *The Messenger* a cohesive, timeless collection of Richmond voices. This magazine features you. We hope that you will lose find yourself in the words and images inside.

Of course, it takes more than a great pool of talent and a lot of coffee and pancakes to make a literary arts magazine happen, and we couldn't have done this without the help of creative writing professors David Stevens and Brian Henry and English department chair Dr. Suzanne Jones. Your guidance and trust in us has been invaluable. Thank you. We hope all our readers enjoy this issue of *The Messenger* and that you will help us continue this mission by lending your voices for the Spring 2014 issue.

Happy reading,

Astoria Aviles  
Rachel Bevels  
*Editors-in-chief*

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by Shannon Rollins

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## Beached // Chris Boss

We made to search the wreckage for unique items.

“You’re not to search the wreckage,” said Billy.

“We’ll do just as we so please, whatever whatsoever,” we replied.

“On my orders,” said Billy. “You’re not to search the wreckage on my orders.”

We made for the wreckage anyhow. Billy fumed about it.

We told him he’d not yet finished teething.

He said, “I’ll be the first among you with a PhD. You watch.”

Whatever Billy. You always were a queer one.

When we drew closer to the wreckage, Billy decided he would change tactics. “You know,” he said, “my mother... she’s an excellent sous chef. She could whip us up a batch of tater tots real smartly. I’m sure of it, in fact.”

“We know what you’re up to,” we said. “It won’t work.”

“No, honest! She’s a great sous chef. I would know!”

We’d had his mother’s tater tots before. “Nothing special,” we said.

“Nothing special?” Billy said. “Need I remind you for whom she caters nowadays?”

Yeah, yeah, one of the Ursen twins or something.

“That’s right. I’ll be darned if those aren’t the finest taters on the eastern seaboard.”

It was silly for him to bring up food at a time like that, when we had our minds fixed on finding unique items in the wreckage. We thought...well, we thought about all the things that were unique. Keys, mentioned Gregory, those are unique. No, we said, they are but also they are not. Well then, what about the lock-box which befits the key? No, that’s the same idea as the keys themselves. We were thinking more along the lines of cartographic charts of sorts.

We could see the wreckage come into detail. It held us in a trance until Billy started screaming. He had fallen to the ground. He screamed and held his hands over his foot.

“Cut it out,” we said.

Well, he only started screaming louder.

We told him the excuse about his mom was one thing, but this was something else entirely. “Stop that now,” we said. “We’re

going to the wreckage and you can stay here by yourself.”

He rolled around until we saw the bottom of his foot. It was gushing blood. And it was all mixed up with the sand as well, both his blood in the sand and the sand in his bloodied foot.

“Oh,” we said. “He must have stepped on an upturned nail. What can we do?”

One of us suggested we apply pressure to the wound, but the prospect seemed rather vulgar.

Another one of us suggested tying cloth around it. But none of us had shirts, and the alternative was out of the question.

“Oh!” said Gregory. “Maybe there’s a first-aid kit at the wreckage site!”

But he wasn’t thinking clearly. There’s nothing unique about a first-aid kit.

“Then we’ll have to let him bleed it out,” said Gregory.

You know something, we said, that’s just about the only thing to do.

## grounded til // Ellen Wright

It would be something  
to sprout wings  
and ascend skyward  
where they say dreams fall  
a light rain into open palms

The sky's a place to  
Become

But we are earthbound  
where ups are far  
and is's are scarce  
and the only wings  
to be found are paper  
synthetic feathers and  
glitter that sheds all  
over the floor [shattered  
fragments of light and  
dream refracting could-haves  
on all the walls]

until we choose to  
become the sky

## Sunday Night // Betty Holloway

Someone once told me the shape of calves is genetic.  
Do you also share your smooth smile with your father?  
You have your mother's burnt eyes and curved nose.  
Maybe his audacity and her serenity mixed to form your kindness.

Each one lent a freckle to your right ear.  
Do your cheeks flush the same crimson  
as your grandmother's did  
when your father's father kissed her?  
Do your eyes tear the same as hers did  
when he left her?

Whose heart do you have?  
I hear it drumming under my left ear.

I reach down and stroke your calf.



Film still from "Isolation" // Julia Eldred // video  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDoU9xY9EsU>

## My Heart the Wanderer // Alyssa Boisvert

It is night.  
A thousand foamy stars dance in the sky,  
A bubble bath of light deluged in dark,  
One that I want to dive into.

Alas, I cannot rest,  
I must hunt my heart.  
Again it is rambling.  
I feel its unflagging footsteps as it runs to you.

I know it makes this journey,  
A thousand times in the lonely blackness.  
Back  
And forth.

It goes when it thinks I am not looking.  
Even as I sit wordless,  
Even as I dream.

Always I must call it back.  
Rarely does it listen.

My commands slide away,  
Like pebbles over a cliff's edge,  
Falling and forgotten.

Patternless,  
Out of control,  
It goes  
and comes.

But when it reaches me again,  
It is a crunched up coke can,  
The wind knocked out of it,  
Empty, cold.

And you.  
You are the one that steps on my coke can heart.

I wait for the symphony of daybreak,  
To push pure sense upon the wanderer within me.  
But still I feel its unflagging footsteps,  
And I know it will take the sunshine of many days,  
Until my heart sleeps through this lonely night.

## Check the Appropriate Race // Liza Hozey

White is what I am. How many times am I allowed to say that without being racist? It's the death color in Japan. America too, I'm told. That's why my Jesus is black. And a woman. An old, rickety woman. A rickety, basket weaver woman in Her hand-carved rocking chair, my Jesus weaving baskets and singing that sweet grass Gullah song. She knows my past and pasts passed before that. She shakes Her head and says, "Nah, chile ya lish' gud," but trails off in Her coughed chuckles. She laughs at my white and how every time someone asks what I am I have to do ethnic algebra. Broke-ass Confederate family that can't afford to even spell out S-L-A-V-E + out of work, potato famine Irish folk + Sicilians that immigrated from one shit hole to another = i. Not to be confused with imaginary i, but the i that I am.

White is what I am. Curse you WASP blood! I don't hold the fact those cop bastards use the synagogues two streets over as speed traps against my Moses. We have Seder together every year anyway. My gypsy Moses, homosexual Moses, Polack Moses yells the same thing when he first sees me. "Shalom you mother-fucking Nazi!" My forced side grin gets him to slap me on the back and laugh, "Mashugana kid! Lighten up Jew killer!" He smiles sympathetically when I don't, knowing I didn't choose to be born in Germany. Just another thing to not be proud of or I'm branded: Skin-head-anti-Semite-Hitler-lover. Tradition is that we open the door for Elijah when the meal begins. We always hope the prophet strolls in before we get to the maror. He never does, and the bitter herb taste sits on my tongue a while after.

White is what I am. Allah gets coffee with me when She has free time. No, She is not a terrorist. She does, however, love to watch a good futbol match. My beautiful Allah does not scream Jihad! in my face. She knows I have my own jihads every day. Only cubic zirconia shine in the hijabs She wears, because She sees how the real ones make me think of Africa. Africa, the guilt that isn't mine to have. She will remind me they're fake sometimes when tears start up as I stare. I cry for Africa. Cry for the HIV infected Blood Diamonds. Child armies and orphaned parents. Death of love. Death of everything. She'll smile soothingly and shush me, "You were not a part of Apartheid either, babe."

White is what I am. Babysitting mi Chico Buddha is my

favorite unpaid form of employment. His little five-year-old giggles echo when I worry about my future. "Hehehehe, you're silly, just silly silly!" Perfect little giggles. Tag is a great game to play with Buddha because He never wants to win. Never wants and giggles, "Don't you got enough without the future in your noggin! Tu es loco!" I don't answer, just catch Him and turn into the tickle-monster. The future is more about what I don't want. The thoughts rise of putting on a uniform and the title of 2nd Lieutenant. In one hand I hold a paid for degree. In the other is an M-16 whose bullets are lodged elsewhere. But Buddha just giggles at me, "You can't always get what you wannnhaahaheheheHA!" The Rolling Stones tune fights its way through inescapable tickles. "But if you try sometimes geeheehaHa! You just might find..."

White is what I am. Not a racist, but a stupid-humanist. I've known the feeling of survival compared to actually living. Vacation has been a full-night sleep, a half-night sleep, just feeling like I had sleep. There was a time I had to live in my car. I've saved a life. Nigga is not a word that I cannot say. I just don't want to say it. I also don't want to say: bitch, fuck, damn, dick, cock, ass, cunt, shit. But I do sometimes. I've seen injustice and voted shitty politicians into office. I even paid these taxes on time a year or two. White is what I am. But there is no box for that.

\*information reported is given to U.S. Census Bureau strictly for the purposes of statistical analysis



**Masked** // Natalie Shaw

My mother left the candles out from Christmas  
for me, because coming home in the dark  
to a dark house  
is like coming home to a crypt:

the wide windows,  
dead eyes that never blink;

the rusted door,  
tight like muscles upon which rigor mortis has set;

my key,  
the mortician.

Electric candles offer a fake glow  
like rouge applied to powdered lips of the dead.

Tonight, my house is a crypt  
a silent veil of inked darkness  
punctured by the false light  
of counterfeit flame.

**Three Stories** // Alison Schuppert  
*for Claire and Henrietta*

[Cancer]

The thing about disease is  
it doesn't care who you are.  
You try telling Cancer  
He can't take the life of a woman in Baltimore or a  
13-year-old girl.

[Scared]

At one end of the city  
a girl sleeps soundly in her rainbow bed while an-  
other  
trembles in fear  
falling on the bathroom floor.

[Scientific Revolution]

Henrietta lay lifeless as  
the knife excised her body.  
Like a saw slicing skin in rhythm, a meat cutter, the  
ten blade  
harvested eternal life.

[1969]

The horizon, indistinguishable in shades of moun-  
tain gray and blue,  
lights ablaze at the opposite end of the spectrum.  
Hundreds of red and yellow trees have sprouted in  
pyramid formation  
in the middle of the ocean. The space shuttle

reaches higher and disappears-  
the sun has not yet risen.

[Beginnings]

Before there was the falling girl, the woman  
what was the world?  
Before the people, before the monomer cells,  
before the brilliance of innovation- a space ship  
soaring  
like lighthouses in the sky?

[Microscopy]

Even the most infinitesimal of microbes,  
*Staphylococcus aureus* or a dust mite, effectively  
invisible,  
can become visible. Harmful, harmless  
this tool does not discriminate.  
The pathologist peers over the microscope, exalt-  
ing.

[Death]

She lies in a bed near Hopkins  
in Baltimore. She knows  
they didn't get it.  
They didn't get it at all.

[Assembly]

What is attraction anyway?

After the chaos came the conference of  
atoms forming subunits  
like rain reaching for the ground.  
Some forces can't be fought.

[2003]

Something is lighting the sky  
brighter than the sun- a meteor shower in the mid-  
dle of the day.  
The rainbow girl watches  
enthralled by the sight.

[Taken]

They took her into space, you know.  
Stole her, violated her, spread her  
across the world. Like peanut butter she would not  
expire.  
Like the tides, she just kept coming back to life.

[Relativity]

A collider in Geneva recently  
propelled particles past the speed of light.  
What happens if every theory made  
to make disorder orderly  
is false?

[Understanding]

We know they took her into space,

they say. Our HeLa is still alive in labs worldwide,  
they say. She is dead we know she is dead,  
they say.

[2003- Columbia]

What if the meteor shower  
wasn't really a meteor shower?  
What if the rainbow girl watching understood that  
seven lives ended that day,  
longingly loving space anyway?

[Cycles]

A line. Linear with a beginning and an end.  
Join the opposing sides and a new shape forms-  
a circle. Beginningless. Endless.  
The rainbow girl wants to pretend it's still a line.

[Tragedy]

Teenagers- only children, really  
flocked to school,  
only to hear the name of their missing,  
falling girl called every. single. day.

[Vengeance]

The rainbow girl wants to kill You  
though You cannot die.  
To be physically maimed, burn at the stake, drown-  
these are the fates You deserve.

[Funeral]

There are the stages of grief  
all adults know.  
Disbelief and Denial. Isolation. Anger. Eventually  
acceptance.  
*Think of Me* plays on as adults witness a form of  
sorrow they do not comprehend-  
children singing *Phantom* for their friend.

[Evolution]

Perspective is always changing  
so how does anyone ever gain it?  
Elusive, like a chameleon shifting colors  
like the crack in the tile that went up in flames.

[Expansion]

The universe and Cancer are one in the same.  
Always growing larger and engulfing  
Like a person, good and evil coexist within  
A black hole, the sun, a dead body, a promising  
treatment

[Baggage]

Looking at this rainbow girl no one would know  
she lost a friend to Cancer or loved space until that  
day  
the day she couldn't see  
she'd grown up. *Think of Me* played on...



Bubble // Dee Glazer // Oil on Canvas (89"x63")

## Annie Waits // Katie Skipper

Hot steam swirls up, painting curling wisps in the air above the glass coffee pot. Splashing some coffee into an old mug, I look up. She is still here, her sleek brown hair falling on to her slim shoulders. She stares out the window, turns to her cell phone on the table before her, then sighs and turns back to look out the dark window; rain pitter-pattering on the sidewalk outside. The coffee shop is empty except for her, and if she weren't here I could go ahead and close, no one is willing to brave the damp winter weather for a cup of coffee. But she is here, and I stay open, wiping down the worn tables again.

Headlights shine through the window as a car speeds by outside, spraying the shop's windows with muddy water. She leans forward out of her seat slightly in anticipation and then sadly sinks back into her chair and stares at her half empty cup of cold coffee; not the right car.

"Do you want some more coffee?" I ask quietly, holding out the scratched old coffee pot. Dark brown liquid sloshes inside it.

"No thanks, he'll be here soon," she replies with an attempt at a smile. She doesn't want me to worry about her. I wonder if she actually recognizes me; we have Literature 101 together, and we had some classes together last semester, but she probably just dimly recognizes me as the guy from the coffee shop. She goes back to staring out the window, and I go to wipe off a table for the third time. Maybe I'll keep wiping the table and it'll wear down until there's no table at all.

A red clock on the wall ticks the seconds by, filling the emptiness. It's late, and he's still not here. She's back to staring at her phone and I can tell what she's thinking as easily as if there were cartoon thought bubbles over her head; surely he'd call if he were going to be late. Maybe he just forgot, but he wouldn't do that. He must have gotten hurt or something, no. No. That'd be much worse. He just forgot, or he was unexpectedly delayed. Maybe he's on his way now. I can almost see the thoughts running through her head as she stares at her little phone. She's wondering if he's lying out there, somewhere in the sleet, bleeding to death in the dark after swerving to avoid hitting a deer or a rabbit or some other small helpless animal. Maybe she should call and see if- no, no, of course not, can't have him thinking that she

cares. Then she would seem clingy, needy. No one wants a clingy girlfriend. She sighs and picks at the fluff that's escaping from the seat of her navy armchair.

I count the money in the register again; \$52.33. Exactly what it was last time I counted, ten minutes ago. And if you add the money from the tip jar one of my coworkers set out it becomes \$54.25. Closing the register with a jangle, I set the glass tip jar back on the mint green counter. I straighten the packets of sugar into a perfect line and put them back on the condiments station. Sighing, I look around. Nothing to do. I could mop the checkerboard floor, but I hate mopping. I'll save that for if I get desperate. There's a shuffling as she unfolds her legs, and turns to frown at the window.

She used to smile more. She was pretty when she smiled; she has one of those smiles that can light up a room like sunshine. But now, sitting in an oversized chair that's losing its stuffing, with her red coat spread out around her, she looks like a wilted rose. I wonder briefly if I should say something, but no, my voice would crack and it would be awkward and what would I say anyway? Your boyfriend's a jerk? I'm sure that'd go over well. I struggle to think of something, anything, to say to that wilting flower, but I merely stand there opening and closing my mouth; like a fish.

The clock ticks some more, and I survey the room. The coffee shop likes to pretend its trendy, like it's just as cool as Starbucks, but with its chairs and tables in haphazard colors and styles, and its mismatched cups and saucers, it looks more like someone pieced the room together from a yard sale; from the stuff people didn't want anymore. Undersized fluorescent lighting makes all the food in the display look plasticized but the coffee tastes alright, especially if you add enough milk; and it's cheap regardless.

I was supposed to be home an hour ago. I could ask her to lock up the shop for me, and then I could go home and get some much needed sleep. I'm sure she'd be happy to do it, and I could trust her not to steal anything, but I don't ask. I'm worried about what would happen if I left her alone, truly alone, not just for want of her phantom boyfriend.

This always happens.

Another car, but just more disappointment and she bites her lip in worry. You should dump your boyfriend; I try out in my head. Then we could go out. It doesn't even have to be now; it could be later, that way you wouldn't be lonely. And we could listen to music. We have the same taste, you know. You always tap your foot along to the songs I choose to play in the shop and sometimes you even hum along when you think I can't hear.

And I've seen you sitting there reading; Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, J. D. Salinger. Your torn and battered books spread out in front of you next to a slice of apple pie (your favorite). But they're not battered in a bad way; they're scruffy in a well loved way, with dog ears marking your favorite pages, doodles in the corners. And I've seen you mouth the words, like you want to fully taste every sentence. Your boyfriend, he doesn't read. He doesn't have the time, or the patience, or something, and he always sighs when you try to talk to him about them. I'd talk to you about them though. I'd love to hear your warm voice as we discuss Holden's past or debate the meaning behind Helena's spaniel speech. Your eyes would sparkle and you would toss your head and laugh like you used to...

He doesn't deserve someone like you, someone funny and kind and beautiful. Sure if you stick with him, you'll probably get voted 'cutest couple' in the yearbook and all your friends sigh when he flexes and tell you how lucky you are, but it's not really worth it. He's not worth it! He's just some jock who has been hit one too many times in the head with a football, and you're... you're something special. And sure, maybe I'm not the college's star football player, and I'm unlikely to be voted cutest anything, and your friends would probably wonder why a girl like you is dating a guy like me, but you could be happy. Isn't that worth something? Isn't that worth it?

I give myself a mental shake, like I could ever say any of that. I wipe my hands off on my faded red smock and sigh. Sneaking a guilty peek over at her, I see she's slouched down in the chair, shoulders slumped. I try to think of something, anything, I could do to make it better...

"Here," I find myself saying, sliding over a plate with a slice of warm apple pie on it. It seems jarringly cheerful compared to

the lackluster room; golden brown crust with cinnamon spiced apple filling that spills onto the clean white plate, and two perfectly round snowballs of ice cream nestle up alongside it. My stomach rumbles, protesting that it hasn't had dinner yet and wants the pie.

"I didn't order this," she says.

"I know," I say, "It's on the house. It's part of a special deal." The special deal where I lose an hour's salary on a slice of pie I won't even get to eat.

She stares at the apple pie and fiddles with the fork I brought with it. "Thanks," she says finally. I go back over to the counter and take my time washing off the knife I used to cut the pie, glad to actually have a task to do. She eats about half the slice, then seems to remember why she's still here and pokes half-heartedly at the rest with her fork for a few minutes before giving up.

There is a sign on the door that lists our hours. We should have closed a little over an hour ago. The scraping of chair legs rattles through the store as she stands up. She shrugs on her puffy red coat and zips it all the way to her chin before pulling on her hat and gloves. Giving me a small wave and a fragile smile, she turns and pushes open the door. I watch her go. I wonder when she'll be back again. I wonder if she'll be back again.

"Wait!" I call suddenly, but the door snaps shut, cutting the words off. They echo around the empty coffee shop and die. Through the rain splattered glass, I see her look around carefully and then walk down the road, shoulders slumped.

She waits.

But not for me.

## Untitled // Shannon Buckley

Slant rhyme no crime  
No crime at all  
No crime  
No at  
I speak in speakspeakspeak then fall.  
I speak do then wish try then not succeed.  
I fall in successive waves my ocean my ocean.  
You take your take time speak none no.  
It's all too big too big and high up big.  
We can't but  
Wait but we can't wait why not.  
I try but wait you no wait oh.  
It's all my living my wait but what about.  
It my feel my break this break you break me.  
You break me.  
Break take me I you we we know we break  
Each and speak in riddles words no.  
But that's the gist no take no prisoners  
Sleep no that's a funny joke no jokes all serious  
It's a joke But why  
Why not  
Too much too much I don't deserve  
Why it's too much I can't do it all but no.  
Its crazy it rubber balls bouncing the room to  
Shreds Shred me up silly little no yes  
Itchy noses itchy clouds all over the sky all gray  
No more of this huh what why.  
He said his name was jane no not really jane jim.  
He's my feel this anger speakspeakspeak why not  
You take my find my

away away anyway  
anyway  
anyway

Each gets it now never but I do want  
why not can't you see I smell it taking over  
fingers stretching no no no no no no  
that little boat going slow first thing I  
ever remember I thought fast no slow  
but who am I to know what know what is that  
You I try you me why I  
I ought to no why not oh I guess so  
You will I say no will not say no say maybe  
say try say think again I draw me you me I.  
Can't I see too much no sleep no me  
but you see too no  
no you don't you do  
Maybe then again we can you wrong I wrong both.  
Brain fuzz no why I guess it's like that  
sometimes.  
Even then now even now even here  
some strange yes very strange some reason  
it smells like yes maybe it's it smells  
like fire.



Contemplation // Laura DelPrato // Photography

## In Memoriam // Brittany Clemens

Since the sky turned brilliant red  
The torn-up earth's been left to air  
And not a soul spoke of the dead.

The kids have been put back to bed  
The news has been cut from the air  
Since the sky turned crimson red.

The field lay starved of words unsaid  
After sirens pierced the air  
And not a soul spoke to the dead.

Brave men have been left where they tread  
Not prayer nor speech were given there  
Since the sky turned violent red.

The world's been loud and bright instead  
With laughs and love and those aware  
That not a soul spoke for the dead.

So this is where we've been misled  
A people now in disrepair  
Because the sky turned bloody red  
And not a soul spoke but the dead.



## Han Solo // Taylyn Hulse

Ewok wasn't my first word, but it could have been. It's just one of those things that sticks for a while, gets lost, and then reveals itself again, all according to some system I may never figure out. For me, it has accumulated to a recycling process of meaning and memory.

It starts with that lucky deck of Star Wars cards I always end up finding. No matter how many times I lose it, it reappears some time after I stop looking. The tiniest shine of C3PO's golden kneecap in the card's corner will catch my eye. The dirty tread of R2D2's tank-inspired feet will stick out from under the queen of spades. Then I know they are home again. I do not consider myself a Star Wars fanatic. There is just something about the story's epic scale that always circles back to me. I haven't seen that hand of favorite character faces for a while now, but I still have my faith they want to play another round.

The theme song found me at the piano bench. I had no clue how to play, but I liked being able to bang on the keys to hear different clusters of pitches. Some were meant for each other and some just made noise. But even the noisy ones made me grin. Then I hit that descending perfect fifth. Three notes bobbed on the top and struck a landing on the bottom F. It was that dramatic space tune all right, and I wanted to learn the rest. After that, there was no stopping me. Even after a decade of lessons, I still had a compulsive habit to play the theme's final chord to end every practice.

My Han Solo action figure sits on the windowsill next to my bed. He's not my favorite character by any means, or at least he didn't used to be. My dad makes a pretty good Chewy impression so I've always been partial to him, but it was his allegiant partner, Han Solo, who I picked up out of the basket. When we were young, my friend John was a certified Star Wars enthusiast, but no one ever really noticed. You might have guessed he would lose himself amongst the alien species and planets far, far away, but it was something else that took him from us.

She was supposed to protect him. Mother characters were never a big focus across the galaxy, so maybe he'll never realize her grave betrayal. A troubling marriage of imbalance and frustration can torment and twist a reality. Motivation of this force was

not untouched by his boyish imagination, but was never fathomed to appear outside the film. Two shots went unheard from drowsy ears. She thought she was saving him from the battles of this world. All she did was erase the light and dark from their saga entirely.

I remember when I found out he was gone. There was no explanation and all sense seemed to vanish. Everything just floated without gravity for a while. I was supposed to be sad. I tried crying, but at the funeral my tears were nowhere. Lost in some space out in that black abyss. His dad brought part of the collection: hundreds of figures of wookies, yodas, and storm troopers. He insisted that we take one to help us remember. And now when I look at my Han Solo sitting alone on that sill, I can. Though he resembles his persona on the screen, we have our own understanding. His plastic figure embodies an essence that I have come to love. His eyes confess his complexity; an honored smuggler in simple disguise. His boots black. His vest, open. His holster, empty.



Olivia // Kenta Murakami // Photography

## whatareyoudrawing // Jenni Swegan

Afternoon apricots mutter  
an avalanche along average-sized  
homes, which flutter but are sturdy  
the way we are sturdy, in rows. We're  
stapling leaves broadside and juicy,  
we're spindling out of Chicago,  
we're nimble nodding like new pollen. The trees  
flex here, all fingers and napes. The man  
to my left strains to chew his saltines.  
Who plays baseball on these tongues?  
Whose coo cozens the marbling creek?  
No there are no people on the plate,  
and no one plays chess, though some diagonal  
clown will tell me all about his sinuses.  
The geese in Omaha are hypnotized,  
marching to the stream with stones  
in their wings. Ghost salts of snow; and I'm  
every mirror away from which a single blade of grass  
spins. No stars, just porridge, just our own  
curdled foreheads. No stars, but we  
are a choir or we are long  
and erect and I can piss my coyest smile  
on any stranger I choose. Giant red  
refrigerators which eye us and sidle  
to our side; it's a Bernarda Alba moon  
tonight and the raisins will hold out,  
will hold out.

Tiny black trees like widows in Spain,  
church-bound, and the impossible  
rocks and the yogurt horizon—

we're splitting the lake which has  
already been dead, and now we will find  
us a herd to concern. Veins! Headspring  
of happiness! Typeface hills interchangeable  
like the clergy or policemen, and bush tufts  
foxing at the tracks. The pinecones all  
blow and a navy blue ribbon  
lilts aloft, to our left, and I was on the right  
but now am on the left, and the ice eats  
and is hungry again, and whole families rustle  
under the fur. Headlong and numerous,  
I dream about the deer again, the teeth again  
and the hand, which is still bleeding  
when the train stops.

In a hallway full of vibrant color, the white sign seemed out of place. It was hastily taped onto a door, white computer paper with the words “Personal Problem Solving Group Meeting” printed in large letters. Levi looked at the stark motif and sighed before reaching for the knob. What happens in Personal Problem Solving, stays in Personal Problem Solving, he thought as the door opened and light spilled out into the dimly lit community center corridor. No sound came with it, though. Levi frowned. Sound could tell you a lot about what was happening in a room, but the silence emanating from the room’s interior was...subdued. As if the people inside were afraid to make any noise. Eyes downcast, he entered, clutching the pamphlet that Kate gave him last night.

Levi had been sitting at the kitchen table when Kate purposefully strode through the front door. She slammed down a pamphlet in front of him. Personal Problem Solving was printed across the top. He looked up at her, eyebrows raised.

He could hear the frustrated quiver in her voice. Kate was at the end of her rope, and he realized that she was shaking. “Levi,” she said. “Sharon gave this to me at work today. She said that her husband did it after his mother died, and now he’s perfectly all right. This whole Pickles thing has been going on for too long, and from my point of view it’s damaging our relationship! If you go to this meeting, it will help you get over your damn hamster’s death.” She drew in a deep breath, steeling herself. “If you don’t do it, I’m breaking up with you.”

Wow, he remembered thinking. An ultimatum. He blinked as he considered that in his head. He had never realized just how much his hatred of Cindy’s cat and how it murdered Pickles created a rift in their relationship, an impassable wall of emotion that Kate had continually been trying to surmount, only to be thrown back again and again. He looked at her eyes and saw it: a soft pleading, willing him to help himself, to go to the meeting. He thought about whether or not it was worth it. He had never thought much about staying with Kate, but then again leaving her was totally out of the question in his mind. He thought about their relationship. There had always been a part of her that was hidden, but now it dawned on him that she had seen Pickles’ death as something that would always be between them, relieving him of

her complete trust until he could get over it. Maybe this one thing was holding them back from...a future, he guessed. And certainly so if she was good on her threat and left him.

So instead of correcting her by saying that Pickles was murdered, he thought that it would be better to take the class. He silently nodded and took the paper from her.

The center of the room was filled with an oval of two-dozen chairs, only half of which were filled. The carpet had a square design, and the walls were lined with bookshelves sagging under the weight of scores of books. A bank of windows opposite the door looked out to where the streetlamp lit the nearly empty parking lot of the community center. The ceiling fan turned lazily, doing little to fend off the summer heat.

For a second he thought that Kate had accidentally sent him to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. But no, he saw some more pamphlets saying Personal Problem Solving on a table next to the door, along with a stack of nametags and a sharpie. Levi wrote his name on one before walking over to the circle of chairs.

Not very many of the seats were filled, and Levi took one that wasn’t right next to anyone else. They were metal chairs, the ones they got out of storage and unfolded for big events. It felt cold as he sat on it, but that may just have been the general emotional atmosphere of the room. No one looked happy. Just like me, he thought. Eyes were downcast, hands were clasped nervously, and chairs creaked as the small group of people fidgeted repeatedly. There were only a handful of people, three women and three men, all looking presentable but clearly a wreck at the same time. The women congregated together, while the men spread out, keeping their distance from each other. One of the women, the youngest one, had been crying recently. While she wore makeup and had the shiny gleam of mousse in her hair, nothing could hide the redness around her blue eyes. Levi imagined they must have been sparkling with life at one time or another, but now they only had a dull glint.

This must be how Kate sees me. An emotional wreck who can’t get over the death of his stupid pet.

No, he thought, Pickles wasn’t a stupid pet; he was my

friend. Levi thought back to that day in college when his best friend had died. He had just returned to his apartment after soccer practice. The team had played a hard game against their rivals, the Wildcats, and Coach Borne decided to let them scrimmage for the entire practice. After showering and grabbing a quick bite to eat, he headed home. Cindy, his girlfriend, was coming over to watch Apollo 13. He needed to be back before she got there; otherwise she would go on a rant about how he was wasting her time whenever he was late to something. He reached his building and hurried up the stairs to his floor, taking only a second to find his key and go through the door. He set his bag down in his bedroom and turned to Pickles' cage, which rested on a small dresser by the closet. He opened it up and pulled the hamster out, setting him on the bed along with some lettuce.

He had just put a bag of popcorn in the microwave and pulled out a beer when he heard the door open in the hallway. Cindy called out a greeting and sauntered into the kitchen, taking the beer from Levi's hand and gulping it down without a murmur in thanks. He frowned, but did not say anything as he reached into the fridge for another beer. Cindy sat down at the small table and glanced around, taking in the numerous cups and dishes in the sink as well as a half-empty box of pizza on the counter and remarking that he lived in a sty.

"Oh, and I brought Fortis over," she said absently. "I thought he might like some new territory to explore."

Levi froze, the beer halfway to his lips. Fortis was Cindy's cat, roaming free throughout his apartment. And Pickles was currently munching on some salad on his bed. He had enough mind to place the beer on the counter before taking off toward his bedroom.

He was too late. Pickles lay on the bed, unmoving, as Fortis calmly walked around the bed. Cindy ran into the room and snatched up Fortis, playfully berating him in a squeaky voice.

Levi felt something snap. That...that animal killed Pickles! And she was playing with it? "Get out", he said, forcefully.

Cindy looked at him. "Oh, come on, Levi. It was just a hamster. You can get a new one in the morning. Look at Fortis, though! He got blood all over his fur. Poor baby."

"Get that animal out of here," he said again.

"Come on, Lev. Calm down."

That was it. Levi lost it. "NOW!" he screamed at the top of his lungs. She looked scared, and hurried out of the room as fast as she could. Levi's anger slowly turned to despair. He knelt by the bed, and wept. Somewhere in the background a door slammed.

The oldest woman, Francine, cleared her throat. She alone looked composed and self-assured; Levi figured she was the one running this thing. "Well, I guess we'll get started," she said, forcing a smile. "Welcome, everyone, to Personal Problem Solving, where we will find out what's holding you back in life!"

A chair squeaked as the blue-eyed woman stood up. Levi could see her more clearly now, wearing a black blouse and the name 'Darlene' written on her tag. She was crying again. She hurriedly collected her things and began to walk out, saying, "I'm sorry, but I can't do this." She visibly shook as she reached the door and had trouble turning the knob. Finally getting it open, she stepped through and walked out.

Francine sighed. Maybe this happened a lot, thought Levi. He thought of Kate, and told himself that whatever the case, he would not walk out of this meeting. He had a lot riding on it.

Francine straightened again and smiled, and continued with her introduction. "Everyone has problems," she said at one point. "But these problems have a greater effect on some people, causing them to clam up and close themselves off from the world. What we are trying to do here is share our troubles with each other, and through that shared experience you all will come out stronger because you will know that you are not alone."

Levi agreed with that. It was certainly true in regards to Kate and himself, he supposed. The issue of Pickles' death had plagued him for years, but maybe it was time to get over it. It was time to start anew: to find a purpose other than wandering aimlessly and mourning a dead hamster.

Before Francine started again, he timidly raised his hand. She looked at him. "Yes...Levi?"

"I'd like to speak a little." He could not explain it, but Levi

had the feeling that he could trust these people, that he could talk openly with them, and that they could help him. He glanced around, meeting the upturned gazes of these emotionally torn people. He saw encouragement in their eyes, and after a calming breath he began his story.

“He died when I was in college. Murdered, more like. It tore me up inside. That wasn’t a good time for me, and he was one of my only friends. He cared about me, you know?” Several people nodded when he said that. “One of those friends who always listens to you when you’re down, who is always there to comfort you.” He heard one of the women begin to cry, her body shaking. The men began fidgeting in their seats. The man in the rumpled suit and wingtips, Phil, was looking at Levi, his gaze full of sadness and understanding. “He never said very much, but I still know that he cared about me. He kept me going.” Levi took a shaky breath. His throat was dry as he blinked back tears. This is too difficult, part of him said. Stop before you hurt yourself. And yet another part of him lashed out in frustration. No. I need this. I need to get this out into the open. He continued, heedless of the terrible memories. He needed to do this, for Kate. He drew in another breath. “And then her cat killed him. Killed Pickles. In one second my hamster was dead and...”

“Wait a minute,” said Phil. “Pickles is an animal?! That’s what you’ve been crying over this entire time?!” The man’s chair flew backwards as he exploded out of his seat. Everyone visibly jumped at his angry outburst, but he did not stop there. “And a hamster at that? I mean, if it was a dog that you had for ten years I could understand that. But a hamster? Are you crazy? He probably would have died soon anyway from old age! You think people should feel sorry for you?” Francine started to tell the man to sit down, but he shouted her down. “No! This is ridiculous! We should talk about someone with a real problem! I lost my wife in a car accident, and I was driving!” The man was teary eyed now, his voice cracking. Levi shrank under his gaze. “I’ve had to live with that guilt for four years without moving on, because I thought that everyone blamed me! But now I see that I’m just beating myself up over it. Yeah, I’m sad that it happened and I miss her, but that doesn’t mean that the rest of my life needs to stop because of it.

Now that I’ve seen how lame you are, I realize that some people are a lot worse off than I am. With that in mind, I think I can get over my wife’s death!” He paused to take a shaky breath. His face was a dark red, and his eyes revealed a mixture of anger and agony. Eventually the anger won out, and his voice did not shake when he spoke again. “Wow, I haven’t thought that clearly in years,” he said, and then turned to Francine. “It appears, ma’am, that your class actually works. Thank you.” And with that he stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

The room was dead silent in the wake of his departure. No one moved a muscle as they all stared at the door. The man’s fallen chair stayed where it was.

A buzzing sound came from one corner of the room. Every head snapped in that direction as a stinkbug lazily made its way from a windowsill to the top of the nearest bookshelf. It landed and began roaming around the new territory.

A chuckle came from one corner of the circle. Every head whipped that way to see another man chuckling, and then laughing, his body shaking uncontrollably. He threw his head back as his chair threatened to tip over.

There was a moment of shock as everyone stared at this madman, and then the floodgates opened as the room started laughing. The woman next to Levi held her sides while the man across from him was doubled over. The man who had started laughing was now rolling on the floor, and even Francine was giggling while trying to maintain a composed aura.

Levi soon joined in. The more he laughed, the more he felt that a burden was being lifted off his shoulders. He began to realize just how ridiculous that burden was, that he had mourned for so long. Maybe, he thought, he had been more affected by Cindy’s uncaring response towards the whole thing as opposed to Pickles’ death, or by the way that she had cared more about the size of her cat’s hairball than the hamster’s demise. Now, as he laughed, he realized that he did not actually care anymore about Cindy or her cat. He had more important things to care about now.

The meeting ended shortly after. On his way home Levi stopped to get some lilacs. They were Kate’s favorites.

## Glorified Nonsense // Emily Blevins

How to overcome  
taboos that chase our sons  
and daughters with unnatural demons?

How can we  
(must we!) fight an enemy that knows naught of  
honesty?

Retreat in all its necessity sharpens the claws of our  
opponents.  
Tragedy is nourished by our sweet-tongued allies.

Allies screaming on silver soapboxes  
their bubblegum tongues twisting in fury,  
Lungs in teeth.

## To measure feared and coming naught

// Sam Crusemire

To measure feared and coming naught,  
despairing, I commenced  
and lost whole days. But pressures taught  
that it's no matter, since

my head will soon be crowned with stone  
and when the sun agrees,  
his arms won't scorch the thick-dressed wound  
in shade eternally.

Then each rewoven scratched-on sheet  
helped stitch to health my doubt.  
Just rites achieve some regal feat  
once breaths have been crossed out.

But now's to sleeplessly conclude,  
since I've still time and more,  
I won't use light to cry nor brood  
my erring, erasing ends.

## When to Let Go // Taylyn Hulse

There was a little mouse that lived in a tiny crevasse in the kitchen wall. He was an innocent looking mouse, but as with most mice, he liked to steal. He stole what he could find. Baby Charlotte loved pointing him out from her high chair. Bib tied around her neck, cheerios knocked to the floor, she would point her finger out front and babble Mah! The little mouse would scramble around as if baby Charlotte could catch him. He didn't know she was attached to her throne.

He usually preferred the fallen cheerios or trinkets like beaded bracelets, but one day he tried to steal a scarf. It was a Turkish scarf with a bright blue pattern that was lined with shining gold. As the mouse took the scarf by his tiny teeth and scooted it across the floor, the dog's ears perked. He barked and ran after the scarf. The little mouse hurried his fast feet. With its mouth holding tight, a blue and gold tail trailed behind him. The scarf was much too heavy for the mouse and much too big for the crevasse. Though the little mouse made it, the scarf stuck and left the dog sniffing.

The dog started to chew on the scarf when Father walked in. He gnawed and slobbered and made the edges fringe. Father shouted *No* in a low tone. His hand settled on a warm, damp spot when he picked it up. His other hand was wrapped around an old travel duffel and car keys. The keys tapped into each other as he walked, making the softest ting. Father walked into the living room and stopped at the door frame. His face was stern and his eyes sank back into the dark.

Mother looked up from her reading. She sat on the big, red lounge chair in the corner. It had a velvety cover that, when brushed aside, changed to a deep red like blood. The light from the lamp yellowed her skin and made her look old. She looked at the suitcase and her head sank. Their long line of lovely moments had gradually taken a plunge.

Father's empty eyes told her he was done. The air in the room hung heavy. Mother waited for anything. He took a step forward and laid down the scarf so gently. It rested alone on the dark oak table by the lamp. A slight turn and he went without a word.

Mother waited in the chair until her shocked fogginess faded away. She picked up the scarf and circled it around and around her neck and shoulders until it sat just right. It had been her favorite. The scarf had been given as a gift by her grandmother who has long since passed. She wore it to school every day that first week. She wore it to the best ballet she ever saw. She wore it on the train when she moved to the city. She wore it to the Vietnamese restaurant when they had first dinner together.

Baby Charlotte cried in the front room. Mother noticed the scarf's frayed edges from the dog. When mother held Baby Charlotte, she bounced a few times and then smoothed out her swings. Baby Charlotte calmed and took the bright blue and gold scarf in her small hands. She laughed as Mother continued to bounce and swing, bounce and swing. They walked into the hall together and Mother caught their reflection in the mirror. The way the scarf draped down was unfamiliar. Charlotte giggled and tugged on it, twisting it around her wrists. Her eyes shined. Mother took a moment. She then slid it from her neck, freshly warmed, and wrapped it around Baby Charlotte.



## Margaret and the Wanderer // Lucy Graham

There was nothing I could do to stop the tide. It just broke and broke and broke, and while there were bodies floating on the surface, I wasn't particularly upset by them. I could see their ivory skin, the general swelling of their forms, and the sway of their hair with the sea's rhythm. I was thankful to be witnessing their slow approach through the dawn rather than a black, vacuous night like the one I'd just sat through.

Actually, the terror came from the fact that I was alone on the beach. It was just that current and me, and like the ticking of a clock I knew I would never silence it. The bodies were washing up and I was listening, standing this communal ground on my own. None of these people in the water could help me.

I took in the tepid breeze—there was the scent of my vomit, and salt, and a million other organic things I would never know—and just then I felt something else, a brush against my ankle, soft and warm and so light it was little more than a tickle. I looked down to find a familiar beagle I'd seen around town. There was an elegance about her: she had thin legs and a long, freckled snout, and her giant black pupils stared up at me, dark and vast as the formless cosmos. I stooped and stroked her satin ears, letting her lick my wrists and sniffle up my forearms so she could find out for herself who I was.

As she examined me I searched her face and eyes for a name, hoping her visage would strike some chord within me and tell me what to call her. And then, after a moment or two, I said, "You're a Margaret. There's no question."

I stood back up and observed the seascape once more, yielding to the sickening cadence of the current and facing, unmediated, the nasty truths they held out to me: my sisters had harpoons in their sides and stomachs, while my mother's was in her neck and my father's in his chest. They were things now, like the hard sand beneath my feet, and the

flaccid saline seaweed scattered about, and the dead purple toenail that was peeling from my right big toe. I'd identified all of them but buried none. I told myself the crimson ocean would swallow them up just fine, or else the sun would boil them back into the earth from whence they'd come. There was no role for me here.

I'd searched the town for others, but I'd found no one. Somehow I had dodged the catastrophe, and somehow so had Margaret the Beagle. I'd done nothing special, only sat and sweated in the dark until morning. But now, lucky me, here I was standing upright on the shore.

"Margaret," I cooed softly as I turned away from the sea. She looked up at me, probably not responding to her new name, but rather to me, the sole voice in this void. "Let's go." I picked up my heavy brick feet and began walking inland, back through the thick grasses and still further, into the shadowed tangled woods at the edge of town. And all the while a cadence of quick, light footfalls played beside me, each a steady and recurring insistence that I was not, in fact, the only one.

## Move Me Brightly // Martha Ashe

*Let my inspiration flow in token rhyme, suggesting rhythm...*  
*-Grateful Dead*

Who is this mysterious Inspiration and where can I find him?  
Surely  
not in the pencil cup I am fingering at my desk, but perhaps  
in the blue pen, or  
the pink highlighter, or perhaps in the neon universe of star  
doodles  
on the corner of the page. The white expanse engulfs me in  
a deluge of empty words  
crossed out, images undone, impostors of the illusive  
Inspiration. He hides

in the memories of a childhood forgotten. I never once put  
my finger  
in a power outlet, never felt such a shock, but I cannot say  
that I never felt  
the allure of those two parallel slits. I know now that through  
those holes he whispers,  
hisses, temptations to curious boys and girls. How funny,  
that the outlet that comes  
to mind was in the kitchen beneath the bowl of fruit. I have  
looked for him

in the trees, felt around in the grooves of the bark, wrinkles  
of wisdom, skin tattooed  
with initials of people in love or who were in love once or  
who simply love  
living. Noticing the pile of leaves at my feet, I think of  
pumpkin pie and of a patchwork  
quilt keeping the toes of the tree warm for the coming winter.  
I curl up into this

blanket and reserve myself to rest from my tireless pursuit.  
Drifting in and out of sleep,

he appears and embraces me, unveiling the unconscious  
so unattainable in waking.



Mount Kili, Kenya // Alyxandra Pikus // Photography



Growth II // Astoria Aviles // Photography

## A Love Letter between a Glass of Water and a Wristwatch // Arnold Kim

Dearest Wristwatch,

They say that your heart is nothing but metal, but I see so much more. I see little pieces inside of you that form something beautiful, something working, and something helpful. I know that you have 60 other friends, but I'm told that they leave you every time you want to show them that you were made for more and that they always come back leaving you in disappointment time and time again. And your 12 sons and daughters? Well, I guess they stay for a little while longer, but they take turns to visit you one by one as if seeing you was merely just a chore to them. Stick with me, and I'll be by your side for an eternity.

They say that you're a complete bore. That all you ever do is say the same two words over and over again. And for the longest time, we've only met at the exact same spot for only twice a day. For you, two appears to be the magic number, which is why I believe that you need someone special along side you. Someone who knows your ins and outs, and someone who will gladly show you to your friends as you shine and glisten on their eyes.

They say that we weren't meant to be together. That our relationship is merely a time bomb just waiting to explode. That the moment we touch and interlock, your heart will stop beating and you'll be fixated on the same spot for the rest of your life. But tell me, is that really so bad? Is it so bad to stop, relax, and enjoy the scenery around you? You were always on the go and never took a break. Which was why I was never able to catch up to you. I feel as if you taking things slow will be good for the two of us.

I can't promise you the world, but what I can promise you is the joy in simplicity. I am as clear and simple as they come. I am not ashamed of who I am. I have no secrets to hide. My only problem is that I have trust issues, so I put a 360-degree wall around the inner workings of my heart. But with you, I feel as if I can tear that wall down. No earthquake can ever shake me as hard as my soul shakes for you. I know that on the surface there are billions of others like me, but I feel as if I'm different simply due to the fact that I love you for who you are.

So please, help me tear down my wall and let me roam freely in this world alongside you. And as I continue to stand still and wait for you to run around in circles I just want you to know that you were made for time, and I was made for life, and together, we can create our own fountain of youth and help anyone who seeks the greatest joys in life as we walk together side by side, with your hand holding mine.

Forever Yours,  
Glass of water

## Gold-Painted Tassel // Emily Blevins

I wait,  
Angry and silent,  
To embark.

Force  
Both behind and against,  
Inconsistent.

Don't sound so noble.  
You wasted  
Away, knowing this  
And yet, here

It comes, they come  
Dancing in the vineyard  
With lacquered faces.

I lack, evading.  
Fattening with serotonin—  
The glass clock.

To exist outside,  
Free from chiseled order and tradition,  
what a dream.

## Sierra Leone // Taryn Smith

Try to remember when you first fell in love with  
Sierra Leone.  
It had to be a Tuesday, the water gently kisses the  
sand while you smile  
And inhale the salty sweetness of a coast so  
serene. Lose yourself in the sea.  
Remember fumbling your way through the  
rainforest, looking up at a pink sky  
Staring the Emerald Starling in the eye before he  
takes flight and leaves  
Splashes of greens and blues splattered in the  
wind, nature's beauty passing you by.

Can you remember that night spent in the Banana  
Islands – you couldn't say goodbye.  
Black fields of diamonds illuminate the beginning of  
a sultry romance with Sierra Leone.  
The island pulls you and wraps you in its mystery  
before adorning you in green palm leaves.  
At that moment you knew you'd never return. Once  
a smile  
Seeps into your heart, there's no turning back. Look  
to the sky,  
Spread your arms wide and profess your gratitude  
for a love you can see.

Did you remember taking the raft your cousin made  
you to swim through the sea?  
It was past noon when you arrived at Lumley  
Beach. So many people were hard to get by,

You should have left sooner. Shuffle your way  
through the sand, as the sun sets in the sky.  
You are unmoved by time, which no longer matters  
in Sierra Leone.  
Meet your love under the Oil Palm, a smile  
Zips across your lips, you never wanted to leave.

Close your eyes, pretend to soar, beyond the  
tropical leaves  
Floating away from the harbor, drifting from a naked  
beach and sea.  
Fill the air with two teens' foolish love; breathe in his  
laughs and his smile.  
Live in the second, forget the past, dream of a  
future only love can buy.  
This story seemed to always be told in Sierra  
Leone,  
but it wasn't transitory, its intensity decorated the  
endless sky.

The plane shoots into the sky,  
It was time for you to leave.  
Head back home where you belong, forever leaving  
Sierra Leone.  
Your beautiful world in the sea.  
Rhythms of the ocean created a being in your  
belly...time to say goodbye  
To carefree summers now destined to become a  
distant memory. Smile

Although the bliss in your heart is dwindling, you  
smile.

Lay back as you're launched into the sky  
Back to a world you once called your home.  
Treasure the lingering good byes,  
The stolen moments and cherish the child of the  
palm leaves.

Place your palms on your swollen stomach and  
glance down at the sea.  
Warm tears spill down your cheeks as the plane  
moves away from Sierra Leone.

The wind leaves traces of your name in the sky and  
rests them by the sea  
As your gummy legged boy smiles and rolls in the  
sand.  
You remember Sierra Leone.

## Coming Home // Nicole Bredeson

Rickety wood bottomed coaster shakes.

Raw excitement builds into  
sweaty palms,

erupting into sheer terror.

My throat burns:

listen.

You are not.

You're not listening.

Eyes drop in the middle of chipped glass.

Real questions are trapped into  
endless truth.

*desire* lies reality.

Look at me.

at me.

But really.

Really look at me.

They're crying again, endless black tears.

The frustration grows into  
marked regrets.

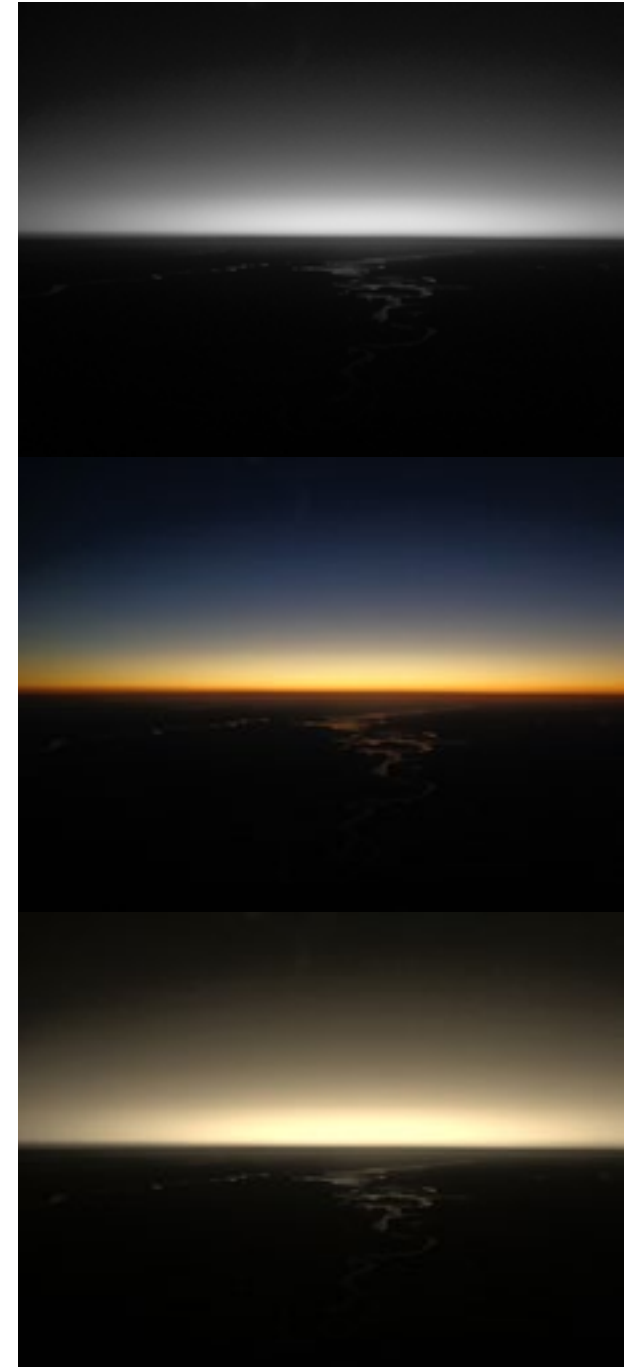
Markings regretted until now.

Good, just go.

Just go.

I'm not here.

Just don't turn around.



## Eyes Open // Hayley Mojica-Morales

Swaying softly in accordance with the breeze  
Smiling sweetly at the sun  
Crisp, beautiful and slender  
With an exterior that reddened and was smooth to  
    the touch  
Veins of syrupy invincibility  
Swaying and free—Free and Living

It wasn't until I made the gentle descent that I  
    realized:  
All along I was a leaf;  
All this time I was a leaf!

Looking up before reaching the ground I saw them,  
    thousands of them  
All leaves, dancing on the branches of a tree.

## America, 2013 // Evan Harris

Land of the free,  
And home of the drone.  
But who cares? Those deaths  
Are far from home.

No need to mention  
Them on the news,  
Rather what outfit  
Did the celebrity choose.

Water down our youth,  
With overcrowded education,  
And make them pledge allegiance,  
To our militarized nation.

Take God out of the classroom,  
The mother demanded.  
Heavens forbid,  
My son obey the Ten Commandments.



## Diagnosing Kyle Grenshaw // Chris Boss

Kyle Grenshaw walked three city blocks to his middle school on 5th Avenue. The city authorities had kept the Mishnor St. sidewalk partitioned ever since they erected the big scaffold. They claimed they did it to renovate the battered museum façade, but recently they had abandoned even the pretense of construction; the museum went under. Now that the square bases of the traffic cones had melted into the avenue blacktop, the city folk figured they might as well acknowledge it as part of the infrastructure.

Kyle crossed over at Bayard Street, the dark, claustrophobic corridor where alleyway hooligans bartered. A policeman had once prevented Kyle from patronizing Locust's Tabernacle Delicatessen, which the officer said ought to be distinguished from a place to buy kosher meats. He claimed his warning was ordinance. The shifty folk on the opposite sidewalk, where Kyle crossed over to, at least kept their shiftlessness open. Kyle then crossed back to the other sidewalk and took the route directly to school. But, sometimes, he idled on the wrong side of 5th Avenue through several traffic light cycles in hopes that the eighth graders would clear from PS 56's stoop. Sometimes they cleared out, often they didn't. They had never accosted him.

"Kyle Grenshaw," said Mr. Carry, during History. "Perk up, buddy." Kyle had difficulty sitting upright because of his back. "That a boy, Kyle," said Mr. Carry. "Now you're talking."

Mr. Carry assigned Lilly as Kyle's partner for an in-class assignment. They were to answer questions on the Civil War and write a practice introductory paragraph and thesis. Mr. Carry said that at this point in the unit, the thesis should address a critical and complex issue. "And no copying directly from the textbook, either," said Mr. Carry. "I want your own words."

He wanted their own words, and Lilly would not appreciate that, thought Kyle, because the doctors said his ADD prevented him from 'contributing meaningfully to class discussion,' which the teachers had often accused him of failing to do, at least until they learned he had ADD. ADD meant he was stupid (was Kyle's analysis), and because he was stupid he didn't know if he was stupid for believing that teachers treated him differently upon learning he had ADD, or if they were stupid for believing he wouldn't recognize

their roundabout method of criticizing him with praise. ADD also meant Lilly would roll her eyes up in the front of the room, when Mr. Carry paired her with him, and that she would have to finish all the work herself, because she was the smartest in the class and he was the dumbest. If he said the Civil War started because slavery was bad, and the north didn't want to let the south treat the slaves bad, she would pretend to write it down but she would really write down something too smart for him to understand.

"Hey," said Lilly.

"Hi," said Kyle.

"We have to answer these questions," said Lilly.

"Okay."

"And then write a thesis."

"Oh." Maybe she thought he was dumb for not knowing what a thesis was.

Kyle watched as Lilly gradually centered the paper on her side of the desk. They had conjoined their desks. Lilly had initially put the paper on her desk to avoid the crack between the desks, but still close to the middle.

After answering a few questions, she asked, "Do you know the answer to this one?"

Which army benefitted more from familiarity with local terrain? She looked to him, waiting.

"Um," he said, "nnn...North?"

"Remember they fought in the south for most of the war."

"South," he said.

"Right," she said. "The Confederate Army."

Kyle sat immediately to Lilly's left in first period English; in fourth period math, he sat to her right; period six Spanish he did the same. Kyle enjoyed the arrangement, especially days when he managed to exchange a few words with her. And Kyle often wished she would show a taste for the arrangement as well. On the first day of class, she had said, "My right-hand man." Kyle rummaged his brain frantically for a response to the effect that he was also her left-hand man for one class in four, and her two-behind-hand man during History. All he could think to say, though, was, "And my butt-hand man...", but he cut himself off mid-sentence. He clenched his fists in profound embarrassment for the remain-

der of the period, inwardly pleading she hadn't heard the remark.

The day after the Civil War assignment, Ms. Hanover from English paired Lilly with Kyle, even though she never did that before. Usually she paired Landon with Kyle and Lilly with Nick. Nick was the other smartest kid in the class. Landon was sort of smart but sort of dumb, so he couldn't answer all the questions like Lilly could. Kyle wished Landon was the third smartest in the class, because then he could answer all the questions and Kyle could listen in on Lilly's conversation with Nick. He could make sure that Nick didn't say anything that made Lilly laugh. When Nick did make Lilly laugh, usually Kyle cried at night.

When Lilly dragged her desk by Kyle's, Kyle said, "Left-hand man this time." Lilly laughed. Kyle smiled.

The urge mounted in him approach Lilly, the following day in math, and say, 'Right-hand man this time.' He feared doing it, though, because he feared over-doing it, and he had considered that maybe he had gotten lucky the previous day, when Lilly laughed, since she had never laughed at his jokes before. He clenched his fists when he remembered that jokes had questions and funny answers, and 'left-hand man this time' didn't count as a joke, so actually he had never told her a joke before, and she never laughed at him before yesterday, when he told a non-joke, throwing the prospect into uncertainty. He was too nervous to say anything to her when the moment arrived.

Landon was being not smart enough the next time Ms. Hanover paired Kyle with him, which prevented Kyle from listening to Nick in case Nick told a joke and Lilly laughed. Landon refused to answer the first worksheet question because he didn't know the answer. Kyle told him to skip it but Landon said he didn't know the answer to the second one either, or the third one, because he hadn't read the chapter. Kyle had read the chapter but for the class's purposes he hadn't, because, reading the questions, he found he knew none of the answers. He thought that that might be a good thing because maybe he could skip the questions and listen to Nick and Lilly, but it might be a bad thing because maybe Ms. Hanover would catch him and Landon staring into the distance while everyone else answered the questions, and maybe Ms. Hanover would yell at them or tell them to focus, and

Kyle didn't want Lilly to know he wasn't focusing. Whenever Kyle worked with Lilly, he pretended to focus on the questions when really he focused on looking like he wasn't focusing on Lilly's hand running across the page, and since Lilly thought he usually focused and was just ADD dumb, he didn't want Lilly to know he wasn't focusing.

He had to stop focusing for a moment when Lilly laughed. He clenched his fists because he hadn't heard what Nick had said to make her laugh. They were talking about something about the book, maybe, but James couldn't hear because Ms. Hanover started looking his direction and he had to remain focused on answering the questions.

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The narrow shadow of a corridor the city called Bayard Street bustled, at times, with shifty folk conducting business behind the alleyway dumpsters. They wore pallid green hoodies, and when the men with black hoodies mingled there, there was trouble. Kyle kept his head down when he took Bayard Street home afternoons, the time of day when the hooded men grew irascible, if they stirred at all. They needed only the one time to glare in his direction, and he got the message to keep his head down.

Transfixed as he was by the image of Lilly's smile, when she laughed with Nick, Kyle forgot to tread discreetly through the Bayard Street corridor. He clenched his fists angrily and emphasized his gait, focusing not two feet ahead of him, whereupon he converged with a black hoody. The black hoody motioned to his hip and lifted the hem of his sweatshirt over his waistline, exposing a pistol grip. He then cocked his head toward the corridor exit.

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Flu season ravaged PS 56's student body. Lilly, Kyle knew from first period, counted among the students affected. Only six students showed up to Mr. Carry's history class.

Mr. Carry stayed the curriculum by assigning a group-work worksheet, but instructing the students to work individually. He

made light of the fact that the majority of the class would have to catch up on their own time, a prospect which, in its strange fashion, made Kyle tremor. And when the other students started the assignment, Kyle sat sulking in his little cubic void. Mr. Carry failed to interrupt his stupor despite repeated attempts. He asked Kyle to remain after class.

“What’s been going on, Kyle?” he asked. “You coming down with the flu?”

“No,” he said.

“You’ve been listless these past few days. Sure you’re alright?”

“Yes.”

“Why don’t you try giving your classmates a hand sometimes, with the questions? They could use your help.”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know why you don’t give them a hand,” asked Mr. Carry, “or you don’t know the answers to the questions?”

“I don’t know!” Kyle replied.

“Alright,” he said. “Just see what you can do. You have been doing the readings, right?”

“Yes.”

“Great,” he said, “then I’m sure you can give some of your classmates a hand.”

“I might not get them right because I read ahead and I don’t want to give an answer about a section we haven’t read yet.”

“Well that’s great, Kyle! You can clue in some of your classmates who haven’t done the readings at all.”

Kyle didn’t respond.

“What do you say?”

“I don’t know.”

“I’ll tell you what. Why don’t you come to the history club meeting, next Tuesday? It’s just me a few other students, all interested in history. They read ahead in the book, just like you.”

“I already read at home,” Kyle said.

“Yeah, but you don’t get to engage in our great discussions. Why don’t you try it, just once? We’d love to have you.”

“I have to go home after school,” said Kyle.

“I’ll take that as a yes?”

“No!”

The following day, under threat of fury, Kyle’s mother forced Kyle, scolding at 101.9, to attend school. He had difficulty retaining consciousness in the musty Bayard Street corridor, and over by the Fifth Avenue crosswalk. In his torpor he nearly collided with a taxi, though nobody seemed to notice.

Nor did his teachers acknowledge his lethargy in class, his vacillating between dark stages of semi-consciousness, marked by wilting eyelids and dreadful cranial throbbing. Ms. Hanover, in observance of the semester shift, assigned the students new seats. Only through some remote flicker of consciousness did Kyle acknowledge the distance placed between him and Lilly. He came eventually to dread English, the class where Lilly sat a continent away.

“They bathed in constellations,” read Ms. Hanover, one day, “presiding, as the progeny of hard-won opulence did, over the cityscape: over the dew which touched on the urban canopies on cool mornings, over the arms of evolvment and its deepest roots, once tendrils, and they knew the name a thing so beautiful. They called it life, unending.” She put the book down. “Isn’t that exquisite?”

Kyle thought so. And he cried.

## Old Book Smell // Ashley Colón

I am an old haunt,  
standing in the crow's nest of forgotten ships,  
smiling at the nicks left in the wood  
from this time or that.  
I touch my fingers to old fox dens,  
relishing in the warmth of a place once inhabited.  
I tie the twigs in my hair.  
Carry the color of moss and algae on my finger  
nails.  
I need the memory of the places I once belonged  
to carry me over to the next rest stop  
as I dart, panicked, through the in-between.



Film Still from “Losing Time” // Julia Eldred // Video  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pp--vptjGI>

## The Contest // Carter Staub

Each spring, my father goes to Bike Week in Daytona Beach. I remember this from my childhood; he is giddy when Bike Week is near, when he can load up his three motorcycles into his trailer and drive down.

He gets out his ratty bandana—never cleaned—and ties it around his head.

He puts cigars in his mouth and doesn't smoke them, just chews and gums it.

A mixture of curiosity as to what he does there and an added want to be by a beach, my mom and I flew down to meet him one year. We pulled into a motel-like building, and my father ran out to greet us, all-clad in leather and beard.

The first night there we went to the street where the main Harley Davidson store was. Along the street were vendors, food, Bud Light signs, girls in bikinis and shorts that said "Hottie" or "Ride me", etc. However, the most dramatic decoration was the motorcycles lined up for miles all along the road. The scene was strikingly beautiful; most expensive bikes had their proud fathers or mothers standing nearby as people gazed and looked, ready to answer questions or talk bike talk. Timid in my black ballet flats, shorts and light colored top, an outfit very appropriate for any other place, now I stuck out. I was incredibly self-conscious, and not that anyone was really judging me—but I felt some sort of biker peer pressure.

I bought a Harley Davidson t-shirt that was a bit too revealing.

The following night, my father introduced us to the main street downtown, nearer to the beach. It was dirtier and more compact. There were drunk people everywhere. Luckily I had had a few beers back at the motel, was wearing my leather boots, light-colored jeans and that same tight Harley tee. Hell, I decided not even to shower that day. I was feeling good and ready to go. We walked around, browsed t-shirts and shot glasses.

We were going into one of these outdoor bars as I passed the bartender to my right, who was standing on a stool, wearing

booty shorts that said "Miss Bitch" and a push up bra. Men were standing behind her to get a look every time she leaned over to hand a beer to the next customer. My mom, dad, and I, then came upon an empty stage and a whole crowd of men. I was wondering what was going on, when my father started laughing. "Carter," he said, "you will never again in your life see this many men waiting together for anything."

And he was right; these men were practically drooling. Some had cameras already pointed at the stage, ready to go.

My mother covered her mouth and gasped. She glared at my father "We do NOT need to be seeing this. For goodness sakes, Woody."

"Ah come on, she's gotta see it sometime." They were talking about me, 19 years old and naïve as hell.

"I have to see *what* sometime?" I was worried. This must be something bad; did I want to see this with them? Would this be like watching *The Titanic* with my parents when I was 8-years old?

"This is a wet t-shirt contest, Carter," my dad said.

Great. I thought. But I laughed it off. "Well, OK—guess we're gonna watch it." I made a promise to myself—I was going to watch this. With my parents. And I was going to survive.

The first girl came out. She was drunk and fat. The men poured water on her white shirt and she started hollering and laughing, jumping up and down with her hands in the air; I tried to play it off as if I had seen this before. I didn't want people looking at me funny, like I didn't belong in that crowd.

Her breasts hung a little bit, which was definitely normal for her age. It was weird at first. But they were breasts. I'd seen them before. What was more disturbing was the way the water illuminated the rolls in her stomach. And every time she rubbed her breasts together her stomach would roll around as well. She would grab her breasts so that she had a little water in her hands and then throw it out onto the crowd. They loved it. Except for the people with video cameras, of course, and they hid their technology from the droplets, eager not to miss a moment of her rolling body and cellulite.

I tilted my head to the side and watched the woman gyrate

around, seemingly happy for the attention, seemingly happy to be wet and exposed. Watching her was depressing and exhilarating at the same time. In a minute, she would get off that stage, put her clothes back on, and walk away. All this would have been was five minutes of utter rebellion, of utter exploitation, and she would return to her life. I wondered if I could ever do that. And if I did, what would that mean? Would I be completely insane? Or would it have been a rush—?

When she left the stage, I knew that I would never see her again. She probably tripped off the stage, and her group of girlfriends caught her fall. Together, she and her girls would go to a bathroom, remove her soaked shirt, put her bra back on, and then a motorcycle shirt on top of that, and head to the bar for another drink. Later tonight, she would drunkenly fall into her bed like the rest of us, savoring the last few moments of this vacation, before heading home to her boyfriend and five screaming children.

But I remember all of them. The woman after her had small breasts and the next was much older, her breasts hung down a bit farther than the others. Of course, they saved the best for last. She clearly worked with the company and was about 22. Her breasts were the smallest and she was the skinniest.

I wanted to leave by that point; I didn't want to watch any more of it. I hated it; this last girl was too hard to watch. As the water rolled down her body, she mechanically rubbed her nipples to make them harder in such a way that made me sad. It was depressing, to have a girl pleasuring herself when she did not want to be. Systematically, she would work her A-size breasts in her hands and squat on the stage, close to the end. Men reached out at her, grabbing and wanting. It was terrible.

I looked at my parents then—and I could see that they were ready to go too. My dad looked most upset; he said “Come on, let's go” and we wandered through the crowd, sliding between the mesmerized audience members, him holding onto me a bit tighter than usual and helping me through. My mom held my hand from the back, and I helped pull her in the same way that I was going.

We didn't stay long enough to ever find out who won,

instead, we sat at a table. I crossed my boots under my chair and slowly placed my head in my hands; I looked at the table.

It was silent for a while, but my dad finally said:

“That is just so sad isn't it?”

I nodded, still looking at the table. I couldn't look up to see my parents' faces. I looked terrified probably, but I was trying to hide it. My mom said:

“Let's go back to the hotel. I think we've seen enough, don't you think so sweetie?” My dad stood up in agreement. We headed back together to the car and then to the hotel. I didn't say much, as I was just thinking about that first woman on the stage and what her life was like off of it.

I couldn't picture it.

When I went to sleep, I thought about my own life. I thought about what would get me on that stage.

## What does unconditional mean?

// Cheyenne Varner

So it's like, this one time my aunt told me to water the plants. I was housesitting for about three weeks and I had the whole loft to myself and I could throw parties if I wanted to as long as they were low-key and nothing got broken or stolen and she didn't want me like, making out with anyone either that would be weird—Just make sure the plants get watered, she said. And so I watered the plants on day one according to the schedule, in the morning at about 7 a.m. and in the evening around 8. On day two I melted some of her chocolate on the stove and made chocolate covered strawberries and I finished off her peanut-butter and I took all of her blankets out of the closet and made a fort in the living room and I prank-called her neighbor while I was lying underneath it. I texted her and got permission to buy some movies on the Apple TV and I filled her bathtub up with water and I got into my new bathing suit so I could see how the darker waterlogged color of it looked against my skin. On day five I threw a private party just me and three friends and we spilled wine but I cleaned it up mostly except for the little stain that I didn't catch on the corner of the carpet until day ten (and then I just moved the side table so it mostly hid it). On day six my friend from day five showed up again after he'd texted me to say he happened to be in the neighborhood and was I free? and I said yes so he came up and we lay under my blanket fort (version 2.0) and kissed a lot but kept it pretty casual. On day seven I woke up with this feeling I was forgetting something and on day nine I started panicking because I remembered and I tried to pour a lot of water on them, they were looking brown those plants and on day ten I watched and hoped that on day eleven they would look better, but they didn't. So on day twelve I took my kissing friend with me to buy all new plants and we put them in the place of the old plants and then we kissed a lot again and left the loft because I told him this was weird so he said I should just go out for the night with him. I got back on day thirteen and when I keyed in I was so hungry I just started making myself something to eat and then I had to finish a movie I had started and I had a school assignment that would be due when I got back from break and my father called, I had to talk to him. Day sixteen through twenty I was out of the place so much I only came in after dark to crash. So it was that on day twenty-two when she

opened the door the replacement plants were dead. She said, I let you be at home in here and you didn't even do the one thing I asked. I told her that I understood why she was mad. She told me I was selfish, undeserving and a brat. I said I could accept that. Then she asked me where I was supposed to be staying until classes started. I said I hadn't made those plans. She said, then here of course, help me unpack.

## Surgeon // Grace Dawson

echo before the sound was made

I heard an echo before you spoke  
lulled through the sound under attack  
staying just to get along  
I nod along with you

dress me undress me  
come cut me open  
establish a bass line  
our hearts are still beating

your zipper keeps time like a velcro detector  
drumming to the beat of your skeleton dance

your screaming sigh cuts me open  
grip your fears into the fluted night

beckon me with your siren's call  
your alien song  
harshly velvet against the shivering sky

delicate innocent  
soft and quiet beauty  
I feel you hypnotizing  
my body's motion  
possessed by the sound  
of your vibrations  
entwined in the frequency  
of your screams

delicate innocent  
soft and quiet beauty  
bare feet dancing

naked on the roof  
let the storm rage  
thunder tear through your fingers

release and relax me into the gentle explosion  
the echo of silence  
release and relax me into the gentle explosion  
the echo of silence



## Lessons from Iftar // Emily Blevins

Peace, understanding, respect--  
the feeling is mutual.

She with hair scarved and I, unconcerned.  
How will I tell her that my father hates  
her, and her father, and her father's father?

We dine together  
and speak of change, peace, respect.  
The feeling is mutual. And yet,  
I cannot help but hear  
the taunts ringing in my ears,  
racist jokes my father has shared with his friends:  
"They want to get blown up. It's in their religion."

While we discuss treaties and peacemaking,  
my mind wanders.  
She is me, born in a different place.  
Would my father hate  
me too if I covered my hair  
and called another book holy?

Peace, understanding, love--  
the feeling is mutual,  
between she and I.  
I feel I must specify,  
the feeling is mutual between she and I  
because my father and my father's father  
grew up in different times, in a different world  
where intolerance, fear, lack of understanding  
were mutual.

Blacks and Whites, Jews and Muslims, Christians  
and gays,  
they did not stop to see themselves in one  
another's eyes.

They did not know that these categories--  
race, religion, sexuality--  
were never part of the Golden Rule.  
Do unto others as you would have them do unto  
you.

Tonight, she is me and I am her  
as our eyes mirror one another's souls. And I  
will make no mention of my father,  
for that would cast a stone  
into the black pools where we hold a piece of  
one another.

And our rejection of the mistakes of our fathers' pasts  
will be mutual.



9mm II // Daisy Gould // Sculpture  
77



9mm Shell III // Daisy Gould // Sculpture

## Hidden // Kelley March

I like to watch the rain in my childhood room. It's now an office with a couch that no one uses, but it will always be my space. Its got big French doors, when I was a kid I was scared. I used to think of escape plans. A way to hide really. If someone broke in, I would be like Matilda and hold myself up under my bed. They wouldn't see me, and then I would get my dad and he would get his gun, and all would be alright.

But it's really nice for the rain. These two big doors, a big green pull out couch, hardwood floors. Real wood, my dad hates fake hardwood. Soft green walls. An old desktop computer. A rocking chair, and one of those really formal chairs that were popular a long time ago. Its off white with a stiff back. I really like, though, the plaid curtains. So homey. So very homey. And the rain is outside. Really coming down, and its absolutely lovely. I am trapped inside. Inside this very nice room, that is all mine. And the rain and the world keeps me here. And it thunders, and there is lightening. And it makes me feel safe in a weird way. I am safe with all that keeping everything else away.

And when we had completed the basement and were starting on this room, as I had already moved into my sister's room, I used to come in here and sit and feel all alone and I really liked it. It was happening when I was a freshman in high school. I was so confused. And I used to just come in here and sit by myself, especially when it was raining. And I would watch as the rain made big puddles in our front yard. And there were two saw horses holding up long pieces of wood that I would sit under, and they were right next to the windows, and I felt so alone, because no one would ever come looking for me there. I liked it. I liked feeling that alone. That I had a place that no one was going to enter, that was completely mine. A bedroom is too easily that. Its too easy for people to know that is your room, so in a way it becomes theirs too. But when this room was in-between my room and the office, it was totally mine. No one else had claimed it yet, and so no one would know that I sat there. The same thing happens with outside spaces. It's easy to claim them and feel that they are yours. But they don't make you feel so protected. Not like in a home. And so I felt alone and protected. That's hard to come by. It really is. But this room has always felt right to me.

When I was very little, this room was all sunflowers. Blue carpeting, a yellow stencil of sunflowers around the wall. And a big yellow comforter that was all things beautiful. It was only sunflowers.

Right in front of the big French doors. A book shelf, of kids books. My own closet that was perfect. It was bigger than me, a lot. I rarely got in trouble as a kid. One time I did, and I felt so guilty that I shut myself in my closet and cried for hours. My mom forgot and came by hours later. She felt so bad. She didn't even know I had been crying in there for all that time. And I remember that, I remember that guilt, because sometimes I still feel it. And that closet held me in. And it kept me, just like this room did. It kept me. And I had a sunflower dress, and I had a sunflower that sang you are my sunshine, and I used to hide it under my bed because I loved it so much. And I had collections of things. I collected things like mad. It started with beanie babies, and I had a lot. And I liked snow globes too, a lot. You never know why you like something until you do, and then (unless something ruptures you) you will like them forever, even if you forget, when you remember you will think I like them. And so I like snow globes. A world captured in a glass sphere. I really liked this one that was the first one I had. It was nothing special. Just a town. But I liked it because it looked mature. And so beanie babies and snow globes littered my sunflower filled childhood room that I sit in today with plaid. And a desktop and a filing cabinet.

These things make me sad, this change, this change from my blue carpet to real hard wood. From no one's place because of inbetweenness to no one's place because no one has use for it. And this room has always been a little forgotten, a little like me. A little unnoticed. No one uses these big beautiful doors because they are inconvenient. And no one notices this room because it is extra. And secluded. And my mom fills it with love, and it is still unseen. The animals use it though, I guess that's something. Another thing is that the door doesn't really let you see anyone in the room because the closet is right next to it, and so it blocks your vision. To see in you really have to enter the room. As opposed to my sister's room, you can see right in if the door is open. This room is also farther from my parents' room, which is really something especially when you are young. I remember I used to wake up and tell my mom I can't sleep. A few times she would sleep with me, but very few, which was right, but hard. She would say go back to bed and think about good things. And so I would return and think of my hiding plan, and I never told her that, and I don't know why.

## The Bar // Betty Holloway

Wedded to my chair outside the old college bar.  
Not a bar tender, just an I.D. checker.  
Not a bouncer, just an I.D. checker.  
Just a kid.

Another kid eating duck wings.  
Flapping his tongue, licking his fingers, face  
covered in barbeque sauce. Me with a book  
full of poems. A book like a song. Me, a musician  
whose songs are played in the background  
of a Pepsi commercial.

In the old college bar, bar crawlers complaining  
about having to show not one, but two I.D.s.  
Me, scribbling words. An I.D. checker  
making minimum wage. Me, just trying to get by.  
Hoping my book will someday  
be worth a million dollars.

An I.D. checker, pulling eight hour shifts,  
Making eight dollars an hour. Me, holding the book,  
I won't sell when it is worth a million dollars. My book  
I will give to my own daughter, a kid, a musician, I will tell  
"Your feelings are worth something"



## Wishing Children // Nicole Bredeson

Did you see them?  
Pinched tight faces in the snow.  
Beet red, pissed, and cold.  
Balled tight fists,  
clotted nose.  
Dark black hair  
in tufts and knots,  
slick with mother's force.  
Unaware and still unknown,  
except,  
except for once.

I saw them in the paper stars  
that drifted from above.  
You stopped me, gasped,  
you stilled my hands,  
the words spilling out.  
The wonder from a child's mouth,  
not you, but yours, for when.  
And instantly I knew,  
it would be back.

Arms encircle tired necks,  
dry mouths, and tongues,  
and pores.  
Wretching open,  
emptied out,  
ripping holes filled and unfilled,  
and filled again.  
I'd like to think a prophesy,  
and you'll find that moment  
short a breath.  
Look, you'll say,  
it's snowing.  
And maybe I,  
will remember when.

## Evolving White // Astoria Aviles

Strands waltzing under water,  
I held my breath for decades:  
Surgery stifling my lungs with chalk  
I cough up clouds and calluses.

I am evolving into whiteness,  
unearthing broken filaments of time beneath my scalp:  
manuscripts and music,  
nouns and neurons—finite like sand.

My eyes are glass beneath the microscope:  
I blink in Braille,  
In language tied to friction tied to loss.

I am evolving into whiteness:  
my memory bleaching into nothingness, my  
anatomy steeping.

I think only of cremation:  
that burnt-umber painting of bones and sinews,  
my epilogue to cream-colored bruises,  
my escape from embodied ash.

## Killed by Crossbow // Carter Staub

In my living room,  
an elk head hangs  
on the white plaster wall,

curious,  
    a head without its body.

The 800 pounds of it on the other side,  
as if it had punched through  
to the attic, nestled next to Christmas  
lights and old picture frames.

He is arching his neck to the left.  
    Or rather—his right.  
And bugling.

—pretending to bugle.  
The taxidermist thinking—

Yes. Just like that.

My father sent me the picture  
holding the dead elk by the antlers.

There's still 500 pounds of it,  
in little packages in our freezer downstairs,  
    newly purchased to hold only elk—  
my father's name on each one.

## To Jenni, On Christmas Eve // Sam Crusemire

From crowded seats for passengers,  
the gray of muted sky  
is watched by twice two trespassers,  
en route to Capra's lie.

November's eighth did add a year,  
one still for you now fresh,  
like Capra's aged, crackling cheer  
and swells of long-done breaths.

The path a falling tear will take,  
invented by a smile,  
is learned from Capra's actors' make,  
lives wonderfully beguiled.

## Embarrass me, please // Sabrina Islam

It was time for my sister's bath. Her rashes were getting worse and I knew that the water from the river was to be blamed for the red spots. I couldn't think of anywhere else I could take her.

It was a dry summer. My father hadn't been on the fields for days. He stayed in and got drunk every night. I would have said, he then beat my mother, but that wouldn't be true. He was a good man. He had never lost any of his possessions gambling because he never followed his brother to the local bazaar on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. My uncle, on the other hand, had nothing. His wife left him in December and his only daughter ran off somewhere two years ago. She was fourteen.

"Rehena, give your sister a bath," my mother said.

I took a bath last night in the rain. It was very cold. I knew I was dying as the drops pelted on my head. I was considering whether it was worth it. It was either smelling bad for another who knew how many more days or not being able to sleep because of my shaking body. I chose the latter and so I was up until sunrise.

"I think the rashes... I think it's the water. You have some on your face too," I said.

"I know it's the water. What do you expect me to do?" my mother replied.

The rain started very late yesterday. I was lying on my belly smelling the grass when my father appeared and sat next to me. The moon had a wonderful circular glow. My grandmother told me that the glow was a sign of heavy rain on its way. She was right. She also said that she never told this secret to Jannat, Reshmi or any of the other farmer wives. They were amazed at my grandmother's natural instinct of knowing when to pick the crop. She snickered when she was passed on the heirloom to me. My father admired the moon for a while and then smiled. I could see him remembering her.

At times it seemed like a miracle that my father was a good man. I saw my lousy uncle beat the hell out of my cousin and her mother. I would run out of their home when I saw him coming. My father intervened whenever he could but he was not there all the time.

One time, my cousin, Sheema, and I were playing with a doll we stole from a shop when my uncle came and started beating his wife. He was beating her because she didn't make dinner. There was no dinner to make. My cousin and I ran out of the house and peeked through the window to see what happened inside. Sheema's face was resting on the wooden pane and the turquoise stone, which was tied around her neck on a black string, dangled and lightly hit the wall now and then, as she watched her mother being struck, now and then.

The rain began as a light shower. My father said that it felt different being in his senses so late at night. He would have been drunk but he was out of booze. He doesn't want to gamble like my uncle or put Draupadi on a bet. He got drunk because there was no business, and because my sister and I slept hungry.

"Can we bathe her with the water you got yesterday?" I asked my mother.

"You know I got that for cooking. Do you want her to get some rashes in her stomach too?" she asked me back.

"Well fine then. I'll take her somewhere where there is good water."

"Good luck."

I pulled my sister on my back and left home. I didn't know where I was supposed to go so I started heading out of the village.

There was a strange smell in the mixture of the humid air and the sun burnt, roasted leaves, which were soaking in piles all over the muddy roads. My bare and dirty feet scratched the small

over the muddy roads. My bare and dirty feet scratched the small stones on the narrow, broken path. I could feel my sister slipping. I crouched and as she slid forward, I could feel her tiny neck brush against the rough skin of my shoulder.

“Where? Where? Where?” my sister nagged.

“We are going to give you a bath,” I said.

“Where?”

“I don’t know.”

It bothered me that I didn’t know where we were headed. It bothered me that we had to even go somewhere. There was a lot of green in our village, and the sky was clear and blue. Everything was clean except the river. There was a monstrous pipeline that carried beautiful dyes, meshed together to form ugly colors, which was then vomited into our lovely river. The elders at the bazaar said that the pipe came from the factory, a few miles down.

I sometimes went to the bazaar and listened to the conversations the elders had. The owner of the sweetshop, Kamal, gave me a treat whenever I went. He said that my grandmother fed him when his mother didn’t, or rather couldn’t. He had a small television in his sweetshop. Old men sat there all day and chat and ate and watched the news and other boring stuff. It was better than nothing, so I watched along. They always talked about the embargo. They talked about these distant places with great amazement and wonder. We used to sell rice to the people from those lands but they didn’t want to buy it from us anymore. It was called the embargo.

My father had the embargo. It was like a disease where no one wanted to buy your rice. I didn’t understand it. He said that the shops at the city wouldn’t buy from him because there was too much rice in our third world country. So there he was, embargoed twice.

The elders said that the embargo virus spread because the men

beat their wives. The virus was supposed to embarrass them. I didn’t know how it helped because now the wives were not only bruised, but hungry too.

After walking for an hour and almost losing hope, I saw the top of some huts appear. It was a village I had never been to but it didn’t stop me from walking straight in. I turned around in a circle to find their water source while my sister’s head bobbed behind me. She was giggling. She thought it was a game.

I noticed a large bucket behind one of the homes. There was water in it so I gathered some in my hands and breathed in. Yes, it was clean and it was finally time for my sister’s bath. I knew it had to be quick since we were stealing water from a stranger.

“Stand here and don’t make any noise,” I instructed her.

I took the bucket and hugged it close to my chest. Fresh water poured out as I tilt it. She shivered but she was also enjoying the bath. Sticking out her tongue and her arms, she tried to touch every drop of misplaced water. Seeing my judgment of her futile attempt, she broke into a gorgeous smile, the pressure of which exploded one of the red bulbs near her right cheek.

The splashes were loud and soon I heard some low voices, which almost suddenly turned into resounding roars as the water owners realized that an intruder was in their home.

In a swift motion, I threw the bucket, grabbed my sister and broke into a sprint. The tip of the bucket got stuck into the ground at an angle near the bottom of a small plant. My sister and I became smaller in the eyes of the water providers. I was laughing hysterically as my sister jolted in my arms. She liked the wind blowing on her skin. Her curly hair swam like brown waves in the empty space. Squinting her tiny eyes, she flashed her baby teeth at me once more. We were victors.

For a moment, the blue sky above us, the green horizon in front, and the brown dirt beneath my feet—were all beautiful.





**Petite** // Ashley Colón

I'll dance upon the ivy  
down your spine.  
Rest my tongue on the small of your back.  
Your hips lull me not  
into sleep.  
Twisted sheets.  
Sweet honey knees.  
You've got freckles on your calves.  
"My hand and your thigh must be having a real nice  
conversation"  
My lips  
tell your ear lobe.  
I'll tickle your collar bone with my nose.  
Graze, like something soft, down your invisible  
breast plate.  
You never look more petite than when you smile  
that way.

**Arlington** // Lisa Hozey

Young men travel to a sea of white crosses  
and marble stars, fate packing their boxes. Man-  
icured green waves are hit by gathering storm  
crowds. The sea fills with a drizzle of salty rain as  
thunder cracks through the darkness, twenty-one  
crisp echoes in the silence. Sirens sing to a man  
who will never hear them. The son sinks below the  
horizon, bright rays descending to depths, nev-  
er again to rise up in a burst of morning-glory. An  
undertow of infantry greets another below. Starry  
skies are folded, left with the leaving. Dismal black  
crowds soon roll away, a single flower surviving the  
storm. Its soft, red kiss burns against the chilling  
rise of a new swell.

## 500 Things I Love About You // Richard Jennis

You said, make me a list of 500 things.  
Things you love about me  
Or maybe just the bullet point perks.  
Highlight the memories you like best, highlight them  
in yellow.

Like sunshine I say  
Which is the yellow of your hair or  
The time we fell asleep, hand in hand on the beach  
And half of my shoulders were peeling off like  
plastic.

Do better, you jested, because sunburn is like  
jealousy  
It takes away from the foundation, bit by bit.  
So I tried the intoxication of your sweet-scented  
perfume  
When we kissed on the coach and ate chocolate  
strawberries.

That's two, you needled, and you're .4% of the way  
there.  
So I wised up to what you wanted and gave my  
answers quickly  
Watching your cherubic, pearly-toothed grin  
Which, by the way, is one of the things I love about  
you.

Now the words flow like gauze, spinning material

out of thought  
Designing the ideal organization so I can express  
myself properly  
Pinching together sand grain visions  
Into cohesive, wonderful, sand castle recollections.

Five hundred is less of a challenge and more of a  
restriction.  
Because I think I could traipse over the limit  
effortlessly.  
I don't think boundaries should ever be imposed  
When it comes to what I love about you.

I love:

Your smile, your charm, your eyes, your walk, the  
way you dance  
Your perspective, your compassion, your charm,  
your passion  
I love long conversations and short exchanges  
I love filling my days with your transcendental  
image.

Most of all  
No matter what may change  
No matter how time wanes and eclipses  
No matter how big a number 500 becomes

I love that I love you.

## Lillian Gray // Lea Ruwaldt

It's among the sky and breeze. The unknown ships flying their sails half mast. The belief we can fly as if we were born with wings simply by going on a ship. I believed I could fly sitting on my father's shoulders as we walked closer to the mast of wood we would take. The gigantic wonder that looked otherworldly. I had never seen one before but when my mother told me stories of the giant ships she would sail as a little girl I imagined they must be full of the wonder that makes men travel miles.

I must have ran around in the sand for miles imagining what it would look like to see waving banners in the wind. Conrad would tell me not to wonder; that I should be happy right where I am, because land is the only anchor human beings can count on. How was I to know he was telling me what he truly believed? He was a man of the huge ships. He had traveled them to the Americas and back hadn't he?

Why of all people did my mother look so sad to board the massive shoe floating in the water? She had so many stories of the sea how it was wonderful but in those tales there was always something seductive and destructive. Something wrong with wanting to freely float about like a fish in the sea. Sailing on it was no different. It was an endless span of the clearest greenish blue and when it hit the horizon and clouds I thought I was in heaven where all the tired souls go. I thought for a moment I could see all the family I had always heard of, I thought I could see Mr. Bass smiling at me saying "don't let go of yer ma's hand now wee one, too big a ship I say. Too big." And he would be right. It was too big a ship, it hid us from the world below, the endless depths ready to swallow us whole but when I would get older I would begin to think that the sea is where we are lost but it is where we are also found. My mother loved it because it gave her a way home; when for others it was constantly taunting them with the endless void they could not see over to find where they wished to truly be. It gave her a chance to revisit what she had lost and when she found those things she could let the sea swallow them up again to be lost for centuries more until they found their way back to shore. I loved the ocean as a little girl. I loved the sand and waves but now

all I see when I look at them is my mother and what I have lost. Somehow the only things that come back are my father's smile, my mother's voice and Mr. Bass telling me time and again "too big a ship I say. Too big a ship." And he was right there is too much ship between us and the sea.

My mother told me my grandmother once said to her the sea will swallow you up and pull you under its currents. It will toss you and turn you like a rag doll but when it spits you out, my mother always told me, it makes you stronger. Like how shells smooth at the ocean's pull so do I think people when they get too tired they leave this world for another one where the waves no longer crash upon them and wear them down too early in life.

...So will I walk upon the sand beneath the salty waves to feel the currents pick me up and lift away my sorrows lift away my dreams and bring what has been lost many times again. Here I stand, for there I saw a ship one day, and learned too big was it for me, for my life was hid away.

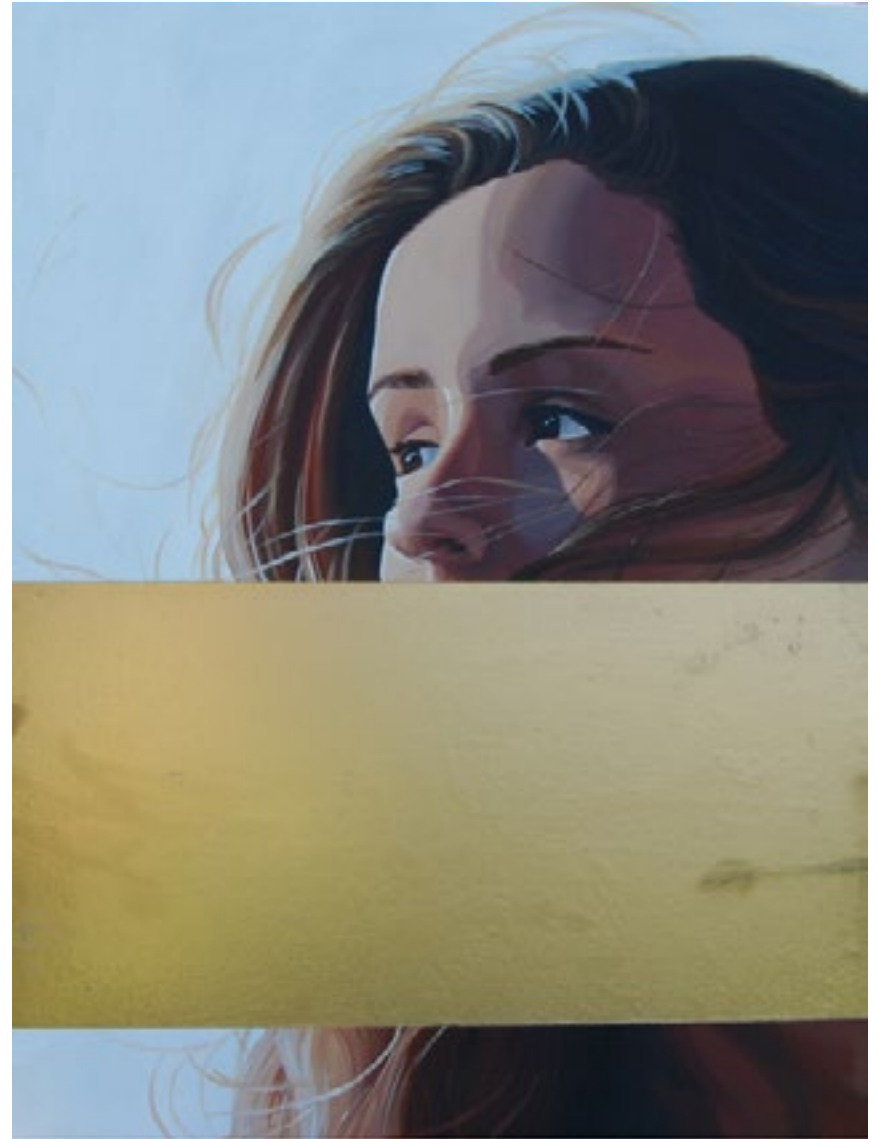
## Hernia// Rachel Bevels

On New Year's Eve,  
you had chest pains  
You had stopped laughing  
at my jokes an hour before  
so I knew you were sick  
or sad. Your face was paper  
as we circled around your  
limp limbs on the couch  
You grabbed your heart  
Mom grabbed her keys  
and She grabbed your hand  
I reached for something  
to grab onto. Between  
teenager and adult, I was  
ignored at the party and  
gladly went with you. Sat  
in the waiting room with her  
trying not to laugh at her  
pointing out the nurse's hair  
standing a foot off her head in  
the jaws of an oversized clip  
Each waiting on you and  
wondering which of us you  
were waiting on, but playing  
friends. Mom came and  
I went down narrow halls  
constricting like veins  
contracting like  
my gagging  
stomach at

the smell  
You said little, so we  
watched the Big Bang Theory  
And I tried not to look at  
the needle in your arm, that  
tear in the fold of your skin  
much smaller than the  
opening in your throat  
that didn't know  
what to let in and  
what to keep out and  
when to stay put and I  
couldn't stay put because  
She had to come and I  
had to go back up the halls  
where I didn't belong,  
pushed out the hernia of your  
heart and into the sights  
of the nurse whose waving  
hair wall was less funny  
alone, until the silence  
got so loud I couldn't  
take it and rode back to  
watch the ball drop with a  
room full of strangers

## When I was a Careless Child // Cheyenne Varner

I picked pearls from Grandma's broken necklace  
like berries from the brush just behind  
the old oak tree grown a few yards from  
the broken back door screen I looked through  
watching Grandma walking in from pruning  
roses in her backyard garden;  
I laid the cold white pearls within  
some watered soil where  
she would never find them, thinking  
the birds would pick them out  
before she went outside tomorrow;  
I knew that I'd avoid a beating,  
but later I'd feel guilty  
Grandma never found  
that necklace  
thief.



Portrait of Susan // Shannon Rollins // Acrylic on Wood

## The Bird// Carter Staub

My father shot a robin  
with his first gun  
when he was twelve.

He didn't kill  
it, so he stood  
two feet from it,  
flat on the ground  
to shoot again.

When it was done, he held  
the bright feathers in his hands  
and cried.

## Caring is Creepy// Chris York

You drink Malbec and yell to him about the Shibuya Station crossing in Tokyo: too loud, too intimate, and too popular—a cocktail of uncomfortability for those involved. I'm rooted in the corner, clumsily trying to grow into the wall. My friend finds me, somehow, and with much animation begins to tell me about a Spanish-looking girl in oversized glasses. *She is the personification of beauty! She is Beauty! I wonder if those glasses are prescription? You should talk to her! I should talk to her!* I nod, not wanting to miss a wink, a touch, the way your eyes scream like neon signs to bored country folk. KARAOKE! LIVE MUSIC! FULL NUDITY! You laugh; the eight-legged monster comes to life—flesh from metal, blood from desire, wine from water—ruining the Gaijins' photo op. I run around the mountain of cars and find myself lost at the Imperial Palace

again. *Which way to the Pakistani embassy?  
Don'ttouchmymoustache.*

No—that's wrong. But hey, I can use chopsticks and slurp audibly now. I stop when I hear Buddha weeping; you buy knickknacks at his retreat and carry them into his oxidized belly. Your mother is inebriated, cursing your friends: they're thoughtless! careless! Wait—I hope you enjoyed the cheese spread. My hands are drenched as your father rummages around in your backpack while you sprint around the train station looking for the ticket in the front pocket. I walk out and join the crowd.

## In the Blue Shadows // Lucy Graham

There was nothing relaxing about the rain on this particular day. I usually enjoyed it, but today I knew how bitter the air felt and how sharp and cold the drops must be. I was sitting in my grandmother's darkening living room, waiting for her to return home. The room had a pale blue carpet, and there were several miniature porcelain boxes all over the tables, from places like Russia and the Czech Republic. Some of them were decorated with horses and unicorns caught in mid-motion, while others had stylized bears and lions, the thin blue outlines forming majestic bodies with crescent teeth bared in terrific roars.

I was expecting my grandmother to open the door at any moment, to feel the wind from the outside, and then for her to call my name softly. I anxiously waited for her voice to dissolve my solitude, and for the bright kindling of a lamp that could ease my melancholy. I was frozen on the cusp of her arrival, paralyzed by indecision: should I try to distract myself with one of her books, like *Robinson Crusoe* or *Heidi*, or should I make a mug of hot chocolate and play around on her grand piano, just to soften the prickling of the rain, the resonant tock of the grandfather clock, and the jarring silence that somehow existed between them?

I'd wrapped a knitted gray blanket tightly around myself, and here I sat, swaddled like a mummy. No matter what I resolved to do with this empty time, I only vacillated like the clock's brass pendulum and found myself right back in the middle, doing absolutely nothing. I couldn't stop the rhythms of the clock and the rain, nor could I hold the shadows still. As I let my head sink into my hands I pondered the possibility of anything at all that could reverse the spell, let the wave break, and end this moment forever. If there were a God it could surely tear me away from these silent halls, the clouded brass, and the decrepit books. It could fill the absences, the black holes all over this house that were screaming at me through the teeth marks gnawed into the furniture, the blade marks on the cutting boards, and the rows and rows of abandoned jackets and leather shoes. It could assure me that this was not the ending to all stories, where all joy and sublimity and progress eventually lead. God could help me escape.

As I looked out the window I saw how the gray of the outside shrouded the entire house, closing in on the living room and

trapping me within. It occurred to me that this twilight might be the kind of truth that would never leave me alone no matter how far I ran or how I distracted myself. It was even possible that I would wait eternally for my grandmother to cross the threshold, poised in suspense like the animal designs on her little boxes before me. The blue shadows were slow, passive beasts, and the more I observed them the deeper and darker they became—colossal enough, I realized, to swallow me whole. They wouldn't do it yet, but each day, each moment, I would watch as they approached, ever so gradually.

Just then there came a click and a creak from the entrance hall. I heard a soft pronunciation of my name and one or two footsteps. And then at last there came the light that, in an instant, transformed everything.



## Lines for the Spider Who Has Probably Bitten the Back of My Leg // Jenni Swegen

You lived in the shower for weeks  
You sly little vixen, you messiah you.

You understood my  
Fragility and my wanting, these being  
Equally yours. You waited,  
Grim magician,  
For trust to billow into my  
Bathroom—  
You are of science, of the sky,  
Of a sick, slick  
Precision.

Something floral and sinewy  
Lashed us together; windy white  
Uncovering, our brightest braid

Oh  
Oh you scuttle over my alpine heart  
You sexy thing  
You president

Let's acknowledge  
That relatively, corporeally, I  
Am a township, a galaxy  
Grand—  
You have left  
An indelible mark  
On an insurmountable boulder

And I sing it in petals:

I cherish you my sister!  
Your courage is our courage!  
I know your indignation and your  
Asymmetry!

Lay that burden down!

And don't you worry  
You angel  
You mermaid

I won't let the doctors near it  
My new Kandinskian tattoo  
This singular ancient thermal map  
This secret chromatic art

You weave white rocky rings  
Around red lagoons!  
You steal a space for the back of my leg  
In a Chuck Close, in a Warhol!  
Reminiscent of  
Whirling dervishes, maybe  
Republican states  
The flag of Japan—

Where nail meets skin is where  
Sand meets lightning is where  
Linen meets monsoon,

Fog yawning at the edges,  
A spoon too small and speckled,  
And all afternoon we drip

Drip dismay, drip irritation, drip euphoria—  
Euphoria at animality, at restraint, at risk—  
The risk of petals bent to shadow  
of blur and tissue death

paper curtains curling

aloneness in the shower.



Untitled // Aleah Goldin

109



Loud Pipes // Dee Glazer // Oil, Marker, and Dried  
Clovers on Canvas (24"x36")

110

## Finders Keepers // Nicole Bredeson

The morning started off like every other one that summer: bullshit. I woke up 20 minutes late only to realize the alarm had been set for 8 PM instead of 8 AM. My favorite black and purple sweater had a stain on it – on the light purple section, of course. I drove the four minutes to work cursing my life and praying for cop-free roads. I pulled so far into the parking space that I hit the light post. Already at my emotional max for the day and all before 8:40 in the morning, I wrestled with the crusty seatbelt and flung open the door.

I threw my keys down on the driver's seat and slammed the door shut. The back windows were down. They were always down and quite honestly, I wasn't even sure if they were even in there. I had decided that no one was going to steal my 1989 Renault Alliance and if they did, fine, fuck you. Try getting a replacement part for that shit box.

My father told me: "If you leave the keys in the car one more time, I will make you walk to work!" I told him I would quit. We stared stubbornly into each other's eyes until finally a smile crept into the corners of his mouth, pulling his tired eyes into the endearing squint that reminded me of my childhood. "You can be a real bitch, you know that?" he laughed. I did know that.

As I paraded across the parking lot in front of Chili's Bar and Grill in Kissimmee, Florida, I was counting off the things I had to be pissed about. I hated working. I hated working Sundays. I hated working at a restaurant owned by my father's best friend. I hated being a hostess. I hated customers. I hated being stuck in Fantasyland, USA because my mother needed "a break".

"A long visit with you will be good for her, Scotty," she told my father. "She's 16 years old. She needs some structure, some distance from her irresponsible 'friends', and a job."

"I'm not gonna stop her from seeing her friends, Cath."

"That's not what I am saying. I am just saying that she needs a break from being with them 24/7. Now if she wants to see them she will have to make the two hour drive back to Largo and she will have to pay for her own gas. For that, she needs a job," she reminded her ex-husband.

And so, like a family-owned and operated boarding school, my father took me in. I was awarded shelter in the front cubicle of his single wide trailer in Sherwood Forrest Mobile Home Park. "It's 55 and up," bragged my father, "but I know the law. They have to let a certain amount of families in, and you bet your ass I called them out

on that." My father had conquered the politics of trailer parks; I was proud.

My temporary bedroom was decorated floor to ceiling in rainbow colors. My six year old brother, who normally inhabited this space, was a huge Jeff Gordon fan. The carpet was a swirling rainbow so big that it curved up the walls. The walls were an interminable Rubik's Cube of red, green, blue, and yellow. Three floor length windows with the blinds pulled tight to the top illuminated the absurdity of the room. "It's important to let the sunlight in; sunlight kills the bacteria," my father droned. *The bacteria*, I thought. Could it get any more dramatic than that?

The bed was one of those white metal framed day beds with gold caps on the corner posts, extracted from a fairy tale book where the beautiful princess falls asleep waiting for her dragon-slaying prince to arrive just in time. The sheets, of course, had the sunglass framed face of a bushy headed man in a racing suit. *Hello, Jeff. Mind if I lie on your face?* I chuckled. At one point I counted all things Jeff Gordon related in the room: 97. There were posters, ticket stubs, soda cans, t-shirts, bowling pins, you name it. The room was a vicarious atonement for a clearly stifled childhood: my poor father.

So I was stuck in that room, in that shoe box trailer, in the 55 and up (*except for us, damn it!*) mobile home park, with my little brother, my dad's girlfriend, and my clinically-or-not insane father, for the entire summer, 'stabilizing myself' and 'learning some responsibility'. Part of that responsibility was getting a job and part of that stability was working where my father could "keep an eye on me". So I had to work at Chili's.

\* \* \*

Determined to make it back to Largo to see my friends that upcoming weekend, I went into work hating the world. The day picked up fast and we were unusually busy for a Sunday. We had our regulars: the Middle Eastern family, party of 10, that ordered 2 chicken fajitas and 10 waters with no ice – extra plates please; the You-Should-Come-Check-Out-Our-Church Baptists, party of five or six or eight, that ordered quirky treats like "I'm having dessert!" for lunch and all you can eat soup and salad, "but just one bowl of each please"; the elderly couple sharing a Presidente Margarita, sitting so quietly across from each other that I unwittingly tip-toed whenever I passed by their table.

But that Sunday would invite a different crowd. It was summer, the beginning of summer, and that meant tourists. Not the usual tourists. Not the school's-out-early southern Florida tourists, or the Mid-Western beat-the-heat family reunion crowds, but the fanny-pack strapped, lobster pink skin, neon green running shorts and offensively clashing tank-top adorned friends from the North: Canadians. Canadian tourists didn't tip and that made for a shitty day for everyone. The servers blamed me for seating the tourists in their section. The tourists blamed me for the servers taking "too long."

In order to keep things moving quickly, I had to help clear and clean tables. I was fast at it and I enjoyed the break in the monotony behind the hostess stand. I sometimes cleared, wiped, and sat tables before the server returned from running food to another table. On a normal day, this made the servers happy. They tipped me extra for keeping their sections full. Today, they glared at me from across the room. Yet their indolence inspired me to work faster. I would keep those fuckers busy if it killed me.

Then it happened. I reached table 53 to clean it and re-seat it quickly. There was a party of six waiting and this booth was large enough to fit them. More than that, Sherry had a bad attitude that afternoon and I thought she could use a nice warm glass of shut-the-hell-up to make her feel better: so I aimed to sit tourists in her section all day long. However, when I reached the table I noticed a forest green fanny-pack lying in the corner of the booth. It was zipped shut and pushed halfway between the seat and the wall. I yanked it free feeling the crispy mesh pouch full and heavy in my hands. I brought the bag to the hostess stand, opened the cabinet, and slid it inside. I returned to finish cleaning and seating table 53 as if finding a huge sack of what was surely someone's entire life savings was a perfectly normal occurrence.

When I got back to my post, the lobby was eerily quiet. It was just after the lunch hour and the rush of guests had ceased, the doors finally closed. I opened the cabinet just a bit to see the dark green satchel staring back at me. I slammed the door and looked around. The servers were quietly closing up their sections and getting ready to head home. The guests were bent over their plates and into each other, the outside world shut out from their private lunches. The bartender was re-stocking the bar, oblivious by nature to the world around him. I opened the cabinet again, crouched to my knees, and stuck my head inside.

The weighted bag jingled when I turned it on its side. I slowly unzipped it, desperate to know what was inside. I felt my breath catch in my throat as the folds peeled back in both directions. *Money. Lots and lots and lots of money.* I counted quickly, my finger jutting between hundred dollar bills at lightning speed; when I got to two thousand dollars, I stopped counting. I zipped the pouch shut hard and silently sealed the cabinet. *I'm going to steal this money and quit my job.* I knew it was true in my heart before it became a concrete thought in my mind. I could feel the crispy dollar bills in my hands. *Where would I put them?* I was wearing a skirt and a sweater – I had two hours to go before I could leave – Where would I tell my dad the money came from – Fear after fear berated my mind, but still, I knew I was going to take this money, no matter what.

I waited for the surrounding rooms to clear and then I struck. I gathered a stack of papers from the top of the counter and pretended to be putting them away in the cabinet. I opened the deserted treasure chest and pulled out a bill, just one bill. I rolled it tightly in my hand, zipped the bag, and stood up. Glancing around the room, relieved to find that I was still alone, I opened my fingers. Benjamin Franklin stared out, his face distorted by the scrunching of the bill. He smirked up at me, lips pursed in a knowing grimace, one eye questioning his beholder. I clenched the bill tightly in my palm and shoved it into the waistband of my skirt. *Dear God, don't let money start dropping out of my panties.*

I waited ten minutes in absolute stillness. I measured my breath. I fantasized greedily about jewelry and make-up, never once thinking about the oblivious visitors, now trapped in the Sunshine State without a dollar to their name. The clock struck two, my shift was over. I had decisions to make. I had gotten away with one bill, could I take more? *Could I take it all?* What I did next, I will never understand. Terrified to take more, unwilling to take less, I returned to the darkness of the cabinet, the violated fanny-pack unmoved from its safe haven. The sound of the zipper magnified by the paranoia of my ears, I reached in and took just one more bill. Moving faster than before, I scrunched the paper in my hand and shoved it beside the first one in the elastic confines of my skirt. I could feel the two tiny bulges stabbing into my abdomen, the pit of my fear pushing back against them.

I had started a routine: reaching in, yanking out hundred dollar bills, each one a consolation prize for my patience. As I pre-

pared to reach in for my third self-indulged token of appreciation, the front door swung open, slamming hard against the inside wall. A rabid looking woman, with closely cropped red hair and uncannily matching over-bared skin rushed through the lobby to the hostess stand. She came within inches of my face, assaulting me with the smell of sweat and panic. The air in the room tightened and I could feel the walls closing in around us.

“...and then I realized I *had* to have left it here!” she was screaming to no one in particular. I adjusted my eyes to see her face, shutting out the feelings of nausea and vertigo that suddenly overwhelmed me. I watched as she raced over to table 53, searching on hands and knees under the booth and the floor areas surrounding it. Her frenzy had alerted the staff, and servers and managers were searching with her, the volume rising in the room causing the noise sensing sound system to follow suit. Within minutes, I was surrounded by the wailings of Celine Dion above me and the concerned squawking of the restaurant crowd around me. “Have you seen it? Have you seen it?” someone finally asked.

I smiled with the corner of my mouth and nodded my head ever so slightly. The woman gasped, slamming her palms against her chest. I bent into the cabinet beneath me and unearthed the cure to her shattered dreams of a fun-filled and care-free vacation. As I placed the pouch in her shaking hands, tears dropped from her sun-scarred face. She mumbled thank-yous over and over in the direction of anyone who might be listening. I continued to smile, pulling my bottom lip further between my teeth, the fear of her sitting and counting her dollars right there crippling me into stillness. The hijacked humps hidden beneath my waistband were there to stay. There was no way in hell I was going to give myself up. She had two thousand dollars in there, it's not like this \$200 was going to break the bank. Finally, the woman turned and jogged out of the restaurant, her head lifted in joy and gratefulness. *The vacation is saved!* she would tell her momentarily downtrodden family. Perhaps they went for ice cream to celebrate their good fortune.

As I turned to head back into the kitchen to clock out, I collided with the manager standing behind me. I shrugged off my jitteriness as surprise and asked if I was free to go home. “Yes,” he nodded, “and good job today. Thank you for keeping that woman's purse safe.” I agreed, bobbing my head in acceptance of his thanks and admittance of nothing. I marched stiffly to the back, begging the

mounds in my pants to defy gravity and imbed themselves into my skin. Luckily, they obliged.

I reached the newfound safe haven of my shit box car and tugged open the door. Climbing inside and sinking into the soft foam driver's seat, I fully exhaled for the first time in several hours. I had no idea if I was in the clear, but I knew I needed to get home, crawl under Jeff Gordon, and sleep for a really long time. I slid my hands beneath my legs in search of my car keys. A moment passed and then I panicked. *Not today!* The keys were not there. I wanted the car to be stolen - but now? Now the keys would disappear? Lifting my bottom to one side, I scanned the seat with my hand finding only a small piece of folded paper. I yanked the paper out, intending to cast it to the floor, when I realized *it hadn't been there before*. I unfolded the note, irritated by its mere presence at a time like this. The chicken scratch handwriting stared back at me, pressed darkly in black pen, the urgency of the messenger implied through the harsh juts and streaks of the letters.

Nicole,  
Told you not to leave keys on seat! Finder's Keeper's. Walk home.  
Dad

I walked home feeling the hundred dollar bills itchy against the skin of my stomach the entire way. I could hear my father's snide voice resounding in my head: *Finder's Keeper's. Finder's Keepers. Finder's Keeper's*. I enjoyed a good, hard, relaxing laugh the entire way home.

## Boots // Rachel Bevels

Ten o'clock. The depot's lights go out. He descends the stairs, trudging toward the business district. The air is thick - another heartless winter night. Tibbs pulls his coat collar tighter and lights a cigarette. The smoke hovers in the air, emitting an odorous fog. At the corner, the blonde notices him and adjusts a tight leather skirt. He slips a dollar in her bra and mumbles something about a rain check.

The train station comes into view just over his right shoulder. Throngs of people shuffle in and out, waiting for a cab back to significance. A whistle sounds, and Tibbs nonchalantly turns his head. Bright lights. The shadow of a young woman. Clickety-clack, clickety-clack. A scream. Brakes screeching. A clunk, and finally, a slow, rumbling stop. Tibbs lets out a puff of smoke, unnerved. As if he'd seen a bag blown away in the wind. He leans forward for a spit as the insignificants spill from the station front in every direction.

A bicycle speeds by, trailing Tibbs spit down the sidewalk. Tibbs turns sharply on his heels, leaving the station far behind him. The laces of his size twelve boots flap loosely against his size ten feet. Compensation. "Bigger shoes give the illusion of added height," he'd once been told. A few blocks down, his foot slips off the curb and into the sewage-ridden street. Tibbs eyes the sole of his shoe, and, with a profane grunt, continues his saunter toward the back-side of town, a mush announcing every step. Tibbs pulls his hat brim lower. No cars in the streets tonight. The neon lights of the clubs pierce the empty neutrality of the store fronts. Tattered 10-percent-off signs beckon from the windows to an audience of street lamps and rubble.

Coming upon Grendale, he stumbles into the empty pub and orders a whiskey. The bartender shoots him a puzzled look. "We don't sell drinks here," he rasps. Tibbs glances back at the door. "Is this not the pub?" "Nah, yer in the right place, but we don't sell no drinks." He stares at the bartender for a moment, flicks a butt to the floor, and strolls out into the night air. In the distance he hears a train chugging north.



Waiting // Lourdes Figueroa // Acrylic on Canvas

## What to Offer, What to Take // Cheyenne Varner

After you passed away, after a little while, people started showing up with suggestions like you used to show up with flowers—if they were slightly wilted flowers given hesitantly in yellowed water: “Sandra, I’m sure it’s all easier said than done, and I know you’ll need your time, but maybe it would help if you would” fill in the blank here. So I started missing phone calls and sleeping through knocks on the door. Some people were harder to flat out ignore than others but generally I was getting by just fine this way. The ones I wasn’t closest too didn’t seem to mind, maybe they felt they had been spared in fact, from potentially stepping on my toes, because of the fact that I didn’t want to dance with them that way. I don’t mean to sound abrasive. I know what they say about the thought that counts. And look, take the woman I used to babysit for every Saturday in college. She showed up three Sundays after and I could hear her at the door. I stood very still with my plate in one hand, thankful my fork was in the other and not clinking on the porcelain. I heard her uncertain exhale and the rustle of her hands going through her purse. I heard the click of her pen and the subtle scraping sound of ink rolling from its metal tip. I heard the crinkle of her coat and the clamor of her keys as she squatted to the floor. I saw the little fold of paper slipping underneath my door. I waited for the sound of her to fade out down the hall and then I clenched the fork between my teeth and grabbed the little note up. I unfolded it with that one hand and read: Sandra, I am so sorry for your loss. In times like these I understand that words seems fruitless and mundane. The boys and I are keeping you uplifted in our thoughts and in our prayers. May God return to you the joy He’d given you in Warren. Just beside that there was a rectangle of ink, words taken back. And just for that reason I wanted them more than anything else. I lifted the note to the light and away from the light and sideways in the light whatever way I could to shift what I saw, hoping to get a glimpse of the lines of the letters she’d tried to un-write. When I lost Aiden, I saw. And I breathed out real long.

And I was so grateful. If I had not seen those four unwritten words I never would have known she had the battle in her mind of what to say and what to keep, tightly in her own weak fist of a heart, just beats from unraveling. Maybe it was too hard, that’s all,

fist of a heart, just beats from unraveling. Maybe it was too hard, that’s all, of a sentence to finish. But I like to think she knew nothing was in it that could make a difference when I read it in my dimly lit hallway. I like to think she knew that I’d find my way as she’d found hers, and if she tried to help that she could hurt, and that the most important things to say could not be said at all.

## the Vote // Lisa Hozey

*For Luke, Blair, and Quinten*

Assumption: People have eyes and can see.  
Truth: People don't see a damn thing.  
The highness of a heel can be the difference  
between a whore, a young woman, and a child.  
The tightness of pants can determine  
economic status, race, sex, preference.

People who do question others' preference  
often lack self-understanding. Don't you see  
why people can't manage to determine  
wrong and right in this wild world of mild grey  
things?

*Why did you do this horrible act?* we ask the child.  
*But we will never teach you the difference—*

that we whisper in our heads. What difference  
does a person's presidential preference  
make? Observation 2012: X-Child  
is living in the hood. Note: He sees  
no escape from his ghetto. Result: Things  
go down, gun out, and X-Child dies. Determine

which president held the 45. Determine  
what bill bought the bullets that made the  
difference  
between death and life. Question: What were the  
things  
lacking reason? *20-12 Race Preference!*

Vote your colors: [ ] red [ ] blue Funny: You see  
[ ]black [ ]white in your mind. What is X-Child?

You thought ethnicity. Answer: Dead. Child-  
hood left covered in blood while you determine  
heel heights, pant tightness, and candidates.  
But see,  
tomorrow will come for us. No difference  
will be made. Do we have death day preference?  
Regret dies yesterday. Happiness thinks things

die tomorrow. Stress wants today. What things  
never really die? I wonder if X-Child  
Ghost chose his pants and marked in his  
preference

for the president. Can a ghost determine  
the four-year purgatory? The difference:  
being in a swing state. I wish people could see

the everything that they think they see.  
Maybe that could be the difference for the dying  
child  
who got no preference in determining his future.



## Nature// Chris York

The crane fucks the cloud  
His body dangles down  
Losing breath,  
ideas,  
ideals,  
despondency,  
  
life.

A few pennies fall meteorically  
Crashing into the ground with a determined *THUNK*  
Bruising the earth like a child with his words  
towards his mother

He is a phantom  
The reality that we choose to drive past  
On our way to fill our tanks with tears and lost  
fathers' days

At the light the obese woman eats her third dough-  
nut  
The skinny druggie pops his third pill  
The mother is distracted by the rays darting off her  
chrome crucifix in the rear-view  
The teen sends his thousandth text  
The old man hasn't been able to see in years  
And his body swings with the wind of the birds'  
wings

A young girl sees him

Not his body  
But the unheard prayers that turned him into this  
ornament dangling from the sky, a resting place for  
robins, blue jays, and cardinals  
Not his limp, bloodless forehead  
    But the loneliness that called it home  
Not his calloused hands  
    But the caste system that tattooed them

Some find comfort in books and promises  
Others in the faux-reality manifested by elixirs  
But what about those who try to live free  
Unchained, capable of flight and empathy

Somewhere a seagull is perched on a rock  
Carved by ghouls and promises  
And the always echoing tide

# Floyd and the Grapefruit// Lourdes Figueroa

## Sleeping

I slept with the grapefruit last night. And we ended up sleeping together for quite a long time after that. Around 11 p.m. I go downstairs, get her from the fridge, and take her to my room. *I have some company. The grapefruit is my company.* She rolls against my upper arm for a few seconds before settling in the nook between my neck and shoulder, her thick and cold skin gives me the shivers.

But after ten days, the grapefruit has started to rot. So I don't store her in the fridge anymore, I leave her on a table beside the window in my room, behind a pile of books, where it's cool and out of sight. Now my room has a bittersweet smell. The smell sticks to my clothes and clings to my hair. I keep the windows open, do my laundry with twice as much soap, and wash my hair both in the morning and at night. But the smell only gets stronger. Flies dwell my room and maggots nest behind my ears.

*Now I have more company. I have the flies flying around my room, the maggots behind my ears. And of course, I have the grapefruit. She is good company.*

"This room is repulsive," my mother says.

"I don't mind it," I tell her.

"This is not healthy for you or anyone in the house," she continues.

"C'mon, it's only my room. And I don't mind it, don't worry, ma."

"But I do mind it. I do worry. We are civilized people. This is a house, not a trashcan. Now give me that thing." She extends her hand. I just stare at her delicate fingers without moving.

## Chemistry is Nice

Two days later I come home after school to find that the grapefruit is missing.

"I was trying to clean this pig hole and found that thing by the window. It's gone for good," my mother says.

"But I didn't mind the smell or anything, ma," I say.

She raises her voice, "For God's sake, Floyd, it's a grapefruit!" My bed feels so empty. *I am alone again. The grapefruit is gone.* I have no company. In the morning I go back to school with dark bags under my eyes because I didn't sleep. I don't realize I have them until

Tatiana, the girl who sits two desks away from me in Chemistry class, asks about them.

"Were you up all night studying? You look dreadful."

It takes me a moment to realize she is talking to me.

"W-what?" I stutter.

"You have bags under your eyes. I was wondering if you had been up all night studying."

"No. I wasn't studying. I just couldn't sleep," I tell her.

There are only a few weeks left of school, but we had never spoken before. I like chemistry class a lot and don't pay attention to anything except the formulas on the blackboard and the periodic table on the left wall. I notice nothing else, not even the pretty girls like Tatiana. After class, she suggests we study together for the upcoming test and I agree.

Now she talks to me all the time and I even have lunch with her and her friends every now and then. I help her with her homework and she tells me funny stories about her summer travels and her four younger siblings. We have a good time together. *I have company again. I like her company. I like Tatiana. I wish she could sleep next to me. Like the grapefruit, huddled by my head.* A couple of weeks later my room stops smelling, the flies leave the room, and the maggots disappear from behind my ears.

Tatiana and I study together for the chemistry final and the afternoon before the exam we go get ice cream, as a reward for our hard work. She gets strawberry and I get pistachio. We both get rainbow sprinkles. We feel like little children and laugh as the ice drips on our hands. *I like Tatiana. She is good company.*

## At the Supermarket

Classes end and the school closes. I don't see Tatiana again for the rest of the summer and I cannot be sure I will see her next year. She is probably going on a trip with her family over the summer. To Greece. Or who knows, maybe Poland. *I miss the company. I miss her company. Tatiana.*

One day in mid July my mother sends me to the supermarket to get milk for the week. Before paying for it I stroll by the fruit stands. I grab a grapefruit and sleep with her that night.



Secret Ocean // Janelle Sadarananda // Photography

## Award Winners

### **The Margaret Haley Carpenter Award for Poetry**

Jenni Swegan, “whatareyoudrawing”

This award is presented to a student who has had an outstanding poem submitted for publication in the University of Richmond’s literary magazine, The Messenger. The winner is chosen by a panel of three English faculty members and will receive \$1110 this year.

### **The Margaret Owen Finck Award for Creative Writing**

Chris Boss, “Beached”

This award is presented to a student who has had outstanding creative work submitted for publication in the University of Richmond’s literary magazine, The Messenger. The winner is chosen by a panel of three English faculty members and will receive \$780 this year.

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